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Reimagining Time and Narrative: Indigenous Temporalities and Social Critique in Rebecca Roanhorse's *Trail of Lightning*

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narrative disruption, temporal narratives, speculative fiction, environmental crisis and media, Indigenous studies, colonialism and media, cyclical time, deep time, environmental degradation.

ABSTRACT

This paper explores how Rebecca Roanhorse's *Trail of Lightning* reimagines time from an Indigenous perspective, offering a counter-narrative to the linear, clock-driven concept of time prevalent in Western thought. Through a close analysis of the novel mentioned above, the study examines Roanhorse's integration of cyclical time, mainly through narrative techniques like flashbacks, oral storytelling, and depictions of deep time. These elements disrupt conventional linear storytelling and emphasise the interconnectedness of time, history, and the environment as seen from an Indigenous worldview.

Moreover, the paper discusses how these Indigenous temporalities intersect with crucial themes in the novel, such as colonialism and environmental degradation. This intersection provides a nuanced perspective on the dystopian realities Roanhorse portrays, encouraging readers to question and rethink the dominant temporal frameworks that often contribute to environmental and social crises. By challenging these frameworks, *Trail of Lightning* invites us to consider a more holistic and sustainable approach to time—one that acknowledges the continuous flow of stories and events that shape our past, present, and future. In terms of methodology, the paper draws on insights from Indigenous studies scholars, including Kyle Whyte, and research from the environmental humanities to frame its analysis.

Introduction

In *Nature's Broken Clocks*, Paul Huebner (2020) argues that the current environmental crisis is deeply connected to how humans perceive and understand time. He points out several aspects of this crisis: the rapid depletion of natural resources compared to the much slower regeneration of ecosystems, the long-lasting effects of technological advancements that continue to impact the environment for centuries, and the rising frequency of extreme weather events. These examples highlight a profound temporal conflict: the urgent need for immediate environmental action contrasts with the slow pace of natural ecological processes and the enduring consequences of human-induced changes

Barbara Adam, a time theorist, contributes to this discussion by describing Western temporality as a fundamental factor in the environmental degradation wrought by industrialised lifestyles. According to Adam (1994), the linear, clock-driven conception of time that dominates Western thought is intricately linked to today's environmental harm (pp. 503-26). This perspective prioritises efficiency, speed, and short-term gains, often at the expense of long-term ecological health and sustainability. To potentially reverse the environmental damage, it is imperative to challenge and rethink humans' relationship with time, particularly the notion of clock time, which has become a symbol of modernity (Huebner, 2020).

This re-evaluation calls for a shift from a linear, clock-driven approach to one more attuned to the cyclical, gradual rhythms of the natural world. By aligning our understanding and management of time with ecological processes, we can foster a more sustainable interaction with our environment.

The role of narratives in shaping humans' perception of time is crucial in this context. As noted by literature scholar Mark Currie (2007), every story encountered imparts a certain understanding of time, subtly embedding a cultural rhythm and a set of expectations about how time unfolds (p. 22). Often operating below conscious awareness, these narratives can influence human perception in ways that might not align with ecological realities. They can either obscure the urgent need for environmental action or oversimplify ecological processes' complex, long-term nature. However, actively engaging with literature and other creative forms makes it possible to develop a more critical and nuanced understanding of these temporal narratives. This critical literacy allows for questioning and reframing temporal assumptions, equipping individuals to comprehend better and address the multifaceted nature of the environmental crisis.

This paper expands the investigation of temporal narratives by exploring their connection to the ecological crisis. In the context of climate change, narratives about the passage of time in the natural world

have assumed unprecedented significance. Current frameworks often prove insufficient, as they fail to capture both the gradual yet impactful accumulation of processes like carbon emissions and the abrupt onset of climate-related disasters. The misinterpretation of environmental time as merely cyclical frequently leads to underestimating its potential for linear progression toward irreversible damage. Pamela Banting (2018), a scholar in environmental humanities, emphasises that conventional narrative structures—primarily linear and centred on cause and effect—are inadequate in addressing the complexities of the Anthropocene. In this era, the environment is not merely a passive backdrop to human activities but an active, unpredictable agent in shaping global events.

This paper examines how Indigenous temporalities, particularly as portrayed in Rebecca Roanhorse's novel *Trail of Lightning*, provide a counter-narrative to the linear, clock-driven concept of time dominant in Western thought. As a writer of Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo and African American descent, Roanhorse reimagines time through a holistic and cyclical perspective that is deeply intertwined with the natural world. This approach challenges the temporal frameworks that contribute to environmental degradation and offers a new lens for understanding the dystopian realities that emerge from these temporal conflicts.

The analysis incorporates insights from environmental humanities scholars and Indigenous studies scholars, including Kyle Whyte, and draws on traditional knowledge such as those of Niitsitapi scholar Leroy Little Bear. By exploring the contrast between the linear temporal narratives prevalent in Western culture and the cyclical, interconnected temporalities found in Indigenous narratives, this paper aims to shed light on the ways time is reimagined in the *Trail of Lightning*. This reimagining is crucial for understanding the dystopian realities depicted in the novel, which reflect the environmental and social challenges of the contemporary world.

This paper analyses how Roanhorse incorporates cyclical temporality into her narrative through flashbacks and oral storytelling. It explores the intersections of cyclical time with colonial legacies and environmental themes, emphasising the deep understanding Indigenous perspectives bring to ecological and historical cycles. Furthermore, the study discusses how these Indigenous temporalities challenge linear historical accounts and suggest new ways to understand time and history.

By reimagining time through Indigenous lenses, this study seeks to contribute to broader discussions

on dystopian realities and environmental crises. It advocates for embracing diverse temporal narratives to comprehend and effectively respond to environmental challenges. As a non-Indigenous scholar, I approach this topic respectfully and humbly, acknowledging my outsider perspective and potential biases and valuing feedback from Indigenous voices.

Contrasting Indigenous and Western perspectives on time

The Western perception of time, deeply embedded in its cultural and intellectual traditions, is predominantly linear (Huebner, 2020). Often visualised as a straight, unidirectional line from the past through the present and into the future, it has been significantly shaped by historical developments. The foundation for this linear view can be traced back to classical philosophy, where Aristotle's interpretation of time as a sequence of events occurring in a "before and after" manner set the stage for this understanding. This interpretation closely aligns with the scientific view of time as a measurable and continuous sequence (Urry, 2000, p. 419). The linear conception of time gained further prominence during the Enlightenment, resonating with emerging ideas about progress and rationality. The Industrial Revolution marked a turning point in the Western understanding of time, transforming it into a quantifiable entity essential for the organisation, coordination, and regulation of industrial society (Adam, 1995, p. 131). The introduction of standardised time, time zones, and the widespread use of clocks during this period solidified time as a linear progression intricately linked to economic and technological advancement.

Though the linear concept of time is deeply embedded in Western culture, it has been criticised for being overly simplistic. Often referred to as "lifeless time," it reduces time to a series of discrete moments, like points strung along a line (Huebner, 2020). This critique points to how individuals in Western societies are conditioned to view and manage time in a way that emphasises constant movement from one task to the next. While this perspective encourages efficiency, it often comes at the cost of a fuller understanding of life's richness and interconnectedness. Critics argue that this linear approach limits our capacity to appreciate the depth and complexity of human experiences, reducing them to a mere sequence of events rather than a meaningful whole.

In contrast to this linear perspective prevalent in Western culture, many Native American traditions, despite their diversity, share common themes related to time. Indigenous temporalities encompass cyclical

patterns and ecological rhythms marked by significant calendrical events and life-cycle rituals. Donald Lee Fixico, an American Indian Distinguished Professor of History, explains that “Indian Thinking” involves seeing the world as a series of interconnected circles and cycles, emphasising the relationships within the universe (2013, 1-2). This way of thinking, deeply rooted in observing nature, has led to tribal philosophies based on the circle, aligning life with the natural flow of the environment rather than mechanical timekeeping. In this view, history is seen as a continuum, integrating the past with the present.

The circular philosophy is evident in the daily norms and patterns of various American Indian groups, from the Muscogee Creek to the Navajo and Crow traditions. For centuries, these societies have organised their lives around circular structures, such as camps built around a central fire for ceremonies like the Green Corn harvest (Fixico, 2013, p. 43). Cherokee elder Dhyani Ywahoo (1987) notes that in the Tsalagi (Cherokee) worldview, life, death, and all forms of existence are part of a spiralling circle, expanding through various dimensions (p. xiii). This perspective is echoed by Black Elk of the Oglala Sioux, who observed that everything in the world, from the sky to the seasons, operates in circles, reflecting the circular power of the universe (Hill, 1994, xi).

The circular ordering of space is closely tied to the temporal dimension in Indigenous cultures (Norton-Smith 2010, 121). Events like harvests and hunts are both spatial and temporal, with rituals and ceremonies often held in gratitude to the Creator for natural bounty. These practices underscore the Indigenous belief in the interconnectedness of all life, forming what is often referred to as the “Natural Democracy” (Fixico, 2013, p. 101). In this worldview, as stated by Onondaga scholar Oren Lyons (1980), all life is equal, encompassing everything from animals to plants (p. 173).

Extending this perspective, Niitsitapi scholar Leroy Little Bear, along with Ryan Heavy Head (2004), describe the Blackfoot conception of reality as producing experiences of fluid event manifestation,

which arise from and return to a holistic state of constant flux. This view sees past, present, and future as temporal dancers, interacting and responding to each other in sometimes unexpected ways. Similarly, Apalech scholar Tyson Yunkaporta (2020) explains that Aboriginal peoples of Australia perceive time as a stable system always in flux, akin to the laws of thermodynamics where “nothing is created or destroyed; it just moves and changes” (p. 39).

In summary, Indigenous temporalities present a dynamic, interconnected, and cyclical understanding of time. This perspective, emphasising the interconnectedness of all life and the importance of environmental stewardship, contrasts the linear, segmented view of time prevalent in Western cultures.

The Sixth World’s time: Reimagining temporality in *Trail of Lightning*

Indigenous authors such as Rebecca Roanhorse¹ have skilfully woven spiral temporality into their narratives, offering readers a novel lens through which to interpret events. Her novel *Trail of Lightning* is an example of a work incorporating Indigenous temporalities, challenging the linear time narratives prevalent in Western science fiction.

The novel is set in a post-apocalyptic world termed the “Sixth World,” a concept directly drawn from Navajo (Diné) cosmology, which envisions the existence of multiple sequential worlds. This setting is not just a backdrop for the narrative but a critical embodiment of the Indigenous understanding of time as cyclical and transformative. In Diné cosmology, the progression through different worlds is marked by both creation and destruction, renewal and transformation. Each world represents a distinct era in the spiritual and physical journey of the people, with its own lessons, challenges, and eventual transition to the next (Begay, 2014). This cyclical view of time, as depicted in Roanhorse’s novel, contrasts sharply with the linear progression of time typically seen in Western narratives, where events are often portrayed as a straight line from past to future, with a clear beginning and end contributes to a broader

1. Rebecca Roanhorse is an Indigenous American speculative fiction writer of Ohkay Owingeh Pueblo and of African American descent, residing in Northern New Mexico. Born in 1971 in Conway, Arkansas, and raised in Texas, Roanhorse is notable for her Nebula and Hugo-winning short story “Welcome to Your Authentic Indian Experience” (2017). Her acclaimed debut novel, *Trail of Lightning* (2018), set in a post-apocalyptic America, weaves in elements of Navajo (Diné) culture and stories, reflecting her daughter’s Navajo heritage. Roanhorse’s engagement with Navajo cultural consultants for linguistic and cultural accuracy in her novel proves her commitment to authentic representation. However, Roanhorse’s work has sparked debate within the Diné community. Some members, noting her lack of Diné ancestry, have critiqued her for cultural appropriation and misrepresenting sacred stories (Reese 2018; Diné Writers Collective 2018). Despite these critiques, *Trail of Lightning* significantly contributes to the discourse on decolonised Indigenous futures and challenges conventional Western science fiction narratives, showcasing the resilience of North American Indigenous cultures.

understanding of Indigenous worldviews and their critical relevance in contemporary discourse.

In Roanhorse's narrative, the past is not merely a static backdrop but a dynamic force influencing the present. The plot focuses on the protagonist, Maggie Hoskie, a trained and talented monster-slayer who is an apprentice of the immortal monster-slayer, Neizghání. Roanhorse employs the character of Maggie Hoskie to disrupt the traditional linear narrative through the use of recurring flashbacks. This technique deepens Maggie's character and reflects the Indigenous concept of time as a non-linear, interconnected continuum. Her traumatic past heavily influences her journey, and these memories act as temporal anchors, pulling her back to pivotal moments. Maggie's flashbacks provide insights into her personal history and her community's broader history and traditions. It is revealed that Maggie's extraordinary clan abilities emerge from a traumatic confrontation with a sinister Sixth World witch and his monstrous cohorts (Roanhorse, 2018, pp. 106-111). In a brutal encounter, Maggie is manipulated by the witch to kill her grandmother and then faces a horrifying attempt at rape. The harrowing memory of her assault is a recurring theme: "I fight a wave of memory. The remembered feel of a man's weight holding my own body down, blood thick and choking in my mouth as powerful fingers grip my skull and slam my head into the floor. A strong smell of wrongness in my nose" (Roanhorse, 2018, p. 9). The trauma of this event etches a deep scar in Maggie's psyche, haunted by vivid memories of overpowering violence. This intrusion of the past into the present disrupts the linear flow of the narrative, illustrating how trauma can make past events feel immediate and persistent.

The novel's structure, characterised by its non-linear progression and flashbacks, or "coming-to-stories," serves as a powerful medium for both characters to share, listen, and heal. Roanhorse intricately weaves the process of healing through the act of storytelling, particularly in the interactions between Maggie and Kai Arviso, who plays a crucial role in helping Maggie reconcile with her past and embrace her Indigenous identity. Through oral storytelling, Kai imparts wisdom and perspective to Maggie, helping her see her clan powers not as a curse but as a potential for growth. He shares the story of his grandfather and the nature of clan powers as "gifts from the Diyin Dine'é [the Holy People]" (Roanhorse, 2018, p. 57), manifesting in times of great need. This oral transmission of knowledge shows the importance of storytelling in Indigenous

cultures as a means of understanding the world and oneself. Maggie's sceptical perspective had previously hindered her from recognising the value and strength of her Indigenous heritage. She initially saw traditional knowledge as "noble savage shit" (p. 57), which reflects the influence of Western colonialist discourse that often romanticises Indigenous people as being 'closer to nature.' Kai's stories and guidance challenge these Western perceptions and encourage Maggie to reconnect with her community and its traditions. Thus, storytelling in *Trail of Lightning* goes beyond mere narration; it becomes a therapeutic process.

Thus, in the novel, oral storytelling bridges Maggie's personal journey and the broader Indigenous temporalities. It allows her to navigate her past traumas, understand her present, and shape her future. Through the oral narratives shared by characters like Kai, Roanhorse illustrates the enduring power of orally transmitted texts in preserving Indigenous knowledge, fostering community bonds, and empowering individuals. This narrative technique enriches the story and pays homage to the oral traditions that are a cornerstone of Indigenous cultures.

Cyclical time and colonial legacies

In *Trail of Lightning*, the Native Apocalypse, known as the Big Water, is intricately linked to themes of colonial exploitation and the environmentally destructive actions of capitalist extractive industries. The protagonist, a skilled monster-slayer, Maggie Hoskie, observes the climatic upheavals preceding the Big Water, including hurricanes, floods, and earthquakes (Roanhorse, 2018). She attributes these disasters to the reckless exploitation of the Earth by multinational corporations: "the oil companies ripping up sacred grounds for their pipelines, the natural gas companies buying up fee land for fracking when they could get it, literally shaking the bedrock with their greed" (p. 23). This portrayal points to the ongoing impact of extractive industries on Indigenous communities, leading to environmental harm, forced displacement, loss of cultural identity, and violations of human rights, including the infringement of Indigenous peoples' rights to their lands and self-determination in economic, cultural, and social development.

In her narrative, Rebecca Roanhorse depicts the current ecological crisis as an extension of colonialism, perpetuated through advanced capitalism. The protagonist, Maggie, reflects on this

continuity, noting, “the Diné had already suffered their apocalypse over a century before” (Roanhorse, 2018, p. 23). This statement connects the Native Apocalypse in the story to the historical experiences of displacement faced by Indigenous peoples. In Roanhorse’s depiction, Indigenous communities face the loss of their land for a second time, not only through dispossession but also due to an ecological disaster caused by settler actions. This portrayal aligns with Kyle Whyte’s perspective on the repetitive nature of climate injustice against Indigenous peoples. Whyte (2016) emphasises that:

“Thinking about climate injustice against Indigenous peoples is less about envisioning a new future and more like the experience of *déjà vu*. This is because climate injustice is part of a cyclical history situated within the larger struggle of anthropogenic environmental change catalysed by colonialism, industrialism and capitalism – not three unfortunately converging courses of history.” (p. 12)

In “Our Ancestors’ Dystopia Now,” Kyle Powys Whyte (2017) emphasises how industrial settler activities have historically devastated ecosystems and impeded Indigenous adaptation capabilities. Roanhorse’s story intertwines the Indigenous experience of time with environmental and historical events, illustrating how past actions and present consequences are part of a continuous cycle.

In *Trail of Lightning*, Roanhorse portrays the Fifth World as a mirror to contemporary times, potentially foreshadowing near future. The novel features a group committed to environmental protection, actively protesting against a Transcontinental Pipeline project. This narrative parallels real-world Indigenous movements opposing pipeline constructions, such as the Water Protectors at Standing Rock, who resisted the Dakota Access Pipeline (Estes, 2019). In the novel, conflicts over oil and natural gas control and widespread protests against extractive industries lead to instability and violence in the former United States (Roanhorse, 2018).

Maggie’s perception of the Earth as a living, responsive entity aligns with Indigenous temporalities, where time is understood as a cyclical and interconnected process. The Earth’s reaction to human exploitation, resulting in the Big Water, is not just a singular event but part of a larger cycle of cause and effect, deeply rooted in Indigenous worldviews: “The Earth herself stepped in and drowned [everyone] all regardless of personal politics” (Roanhorse, 2018, p. 54). This narrative intersection resonates with

ecofeminist critiques by Gaard and Murphy (1998), reflecting the overlapping oppressions Indigenous peoples face.

Reimagining history

It is also worth noting that Roanhorse’s narrative changes the historical trajectory of the Navajo people, or Diné’tah, by depicting them as an independent nation-state in a post-apocalyptic world. This alternative history deviates from the colonial narrative of Indigenous subjugation and marginalisation. In the novel, the United States, as known in our current history, has been drastically altered by ecological disasters, with the rising sea levels erasing its West and East Coasts. The collapse of the U.S., described as having “crashed and burned” (Roanhorse, 2018, p. 69), leads to the emergence of independent city-states like Burque, formerly Albuquerque.

In this reimagined history, Roanhorse (2018) portrays a decolonised space where the Navajo territories are free from colonial domination. The narrative transcends the historical context of the United States as a settler country, offering a vision of a future where Indigenous sovereignty is restored and respected. The novel’s post-apocalyptic setting serves as a backdrop to explore themes of resource exploitation, environmental degradation, and the resilience of Indigenous communities. A significant element in this alternative history is the construction of a Wall around the Diné’tah. Unlike the divisive and exclusionary walls proposed or erected in contemporary politics, the Wall in Roanhorse’s narrative is a symbol of protection, cultural preservation, and reclaimed agency. It is built with songs and blessings, embodying the spiritual and communal values of the Diné’tah people. The Wall not only safeguards against environmental catastrophes but also represents a physical and metaphorical barrier against the incursions of a colonial past and a capitalist present (Wieczorek, 2023).

In *Trail of Lightning*, Roanhorse creates an alternative history that challenges the linear narratives of Western historiography. By envisioning a future where Indigenous peoples have reclaimed their sovereignty and agency, Roanhorse not only offers a critique of past and present injustices but also presents a hopeful vision of resilience and empowerment. This concept aligns with the ideas presented in Nick Estes’ *Our History Is Our Future*, where the Indigenous perspective of time blurs the separation between past and present. As Estes (2019) states, “there is no separation between past

and present, meaning that an alternative future is also determined by our understanding of the past. Our history is the future” (p. 14). This perspective is evident in Roanhorse’s narrative, which intertwines the re-examination of history with a reimagined future. Estes’ and Roanhorse’s works present the importance of challenging dominant historical narratives and demonstrate how such re-evaluations can lead to a future that acknowledges and empowers Indigenous sovereignty and resilience. They show how shared experiences of the past, when critically assessed and “re-storied” (Absolon and Dion, 2017, pp. 82-3), can transform the collective understanding and reshape future possibilities.

Deep time and living landscapes in Trail of Lightning

Roanhorse extends her portrayal of natural elements beyond mere symbolism, endowing them with agency and spiritual significance. In *Trail of Lightning*, Maggie, the protagonist, uses sacred materials like corn pollen and obsidian as ammunition against monsters: “I load my shotgun with shells full of corn pollen and obsidian shot, both sacred to the Diné” (Roanhorse, 2018, p. 9). This narrative choice transforms these elements from being perceived as inert substances into vibrant, active agents within the story. This change echoes Jeffrey J. Cohen’s concept of “an aeonic companionship,” which suggests a profound and enduring bond between humans and natural elements (2015, p. 17). This approach not only challenges the traditional life-death dichotomy but also invites us to embrace a broader understanding of time that far surpasses human history.

Cohen’s notion that “a rock [...] opens an adventure in deep time and inhuman forces of slow sedimentation” (2015, p. 4) is also particularly relevant here. The concept of deep time refers to the vast, almost incomprehensible spans of geological history that far exceed human lifespans. As products of these immense timescales, rocks and minerals, including obsidian formed from the rapid cooling of volcanic lava, serve as living archives of Earth’s history. They record and embody the slow processes of formation, erosion, and transformation that have taken place over millions, even billions, of years. These geological layers tell the story of the Earth’s past and challenge the conventional understanding of time as linear and human-centred.

Roanhorse further expands on this connection to deep time through the portrayal of the Wall

constructed by the Diné. Unlike the concrete barriers envisioned by the U.S. government, the Wall in *Trail of Lightning* is a living entity built from sacred, living rocks. These rocks, adorned with white shells, turquoise, abalone, and black jets, are not merely static building materials; they are infused with the songs and blessings of the Diné people, embodying the spiritual and temporal connection between the community and their land (Roanhorse, 2018, p. 23). Each rock in the Wall embodies the deep time of its geological formation, and through the rituals of the Diné, they are brought to life, becoming protectors and symbols of resilience. This living Wall, constructed from rocks that have witnessed the Earth’s ancient history, stands as a testament to the enduring relationship between the Diné and their environment, merging deep time with the ongoing narrative of the people. Thus, in the novel, the use of rocks like obsidian and the construction of the Wall from these living, sacred stones connect the characters and the readers to deep time.

The notion of ecosystems as guides to rethinking cultural clocks suggests that altering our time measurements can shift humans’ approach toward ecological problems. Humans’ understanding of time can be changed through critical engagement with narratives that present alternative temporalities, such as the deep time embodied in rocks. This approach extends beyond viewing matter as a mere resource, fostering a more entangled understanding of human-matter relations and extending compassion as well as respect beyond the life-nonlife boundary. Instead of seeing rocks as static, lifeless objects, the narrative encourages the readers to view them as dynamic entities that have witnessed the vastness of Earth’s history. Stephanie Springgay and Sarah E. Truman (2017), in their work “Stone Walks”, describe rocks as “queer archives” (p. 852), highlighting their inherent liveliness manifested through natural processes like melting, erosion, and collapsing. These changes, while profound, often remain unseen from a human perspective. This idea also resonates with Jane Bennett’s concept that seemingly inert objects possess a vibrant matter, a liveliness that exists below the threshold of human perception (2010, pp. 3-4). Like other forms of “vibrant matter,” rocks have their own agency and temporalities, contributing to a world in constant flux, even if these changes occur too slowly for humans to notice. By engaging with this idea, Roanhorse challenges readers to rethink their relationship with the natural environment.

Conclusion

In *Trail of Lightning*, Rebecca Roanhorse combines Indigenous temporalities with dystopian realities, presenting an alternative to the linear, clock-driven concept of time that dominates Western thought. Through this narrative, Roanhorse critiques industrialised societies' environmental and social impacts while highlighting a cyclical, interconnected temporal structure closely aligned with the natural world. This perspective challenges the dominant time frameworks contributing to environmental degradation and encourages readers to consider more sustainable and holistic ways of understanding time and our relationship with the environment.

Roanhorse disrupts traditional linear storytelling by employing a non-linear narrative style, including cyclical temporality, flashbacks, and oral traditions, illustrating how past traumas continue to influence the present. These techniques emphasise the importance of viewing time not as a straightforward sequence but as a complex, relational process. Thus, the temporal perspective appears to be more in tune with natural rhythms and ecological realities rather than imposing rigid, artificial timelines on the world around us.

Moreover, Roanhorse explores the enduring impacts of colonialism and capitalism on Indigenous communities, demonstrating how these forces have disrupted traditional temporalities and contributed to ongoing environmental and social injustices. By envisioning a future where Indigenous sovereignty is restored and environmental stewardship is central, the novel presents a vision of resilience and renewal, challenging readers to reconsider their assumptions about time, history, and the future. This narrative form aligns with the Indigenous perspective of time, where history and future coexist and influence each other, as outlined in Nick Estes's *Our History Is Our Future*.

The dystopian realities depicted in *Trail of Lightning* serve as a powerful reminder of the consequences of ignoring the interconnectedness of time, history, and nature. Roanhorse's narrative encourages an understanding of events and stories beyond the limited scope of human-scale thinking, urging recognition of the immense continuum of narratives that resonate across different epochs. These narratives are a testament to the power of storytelling in reimagining history as a spiralic continuum, where the past is always present, shaping our understanding of the future.

Thus, *Trail of Lightning* offers a profound examination of how different conceptions of time influence our interactions with the environment and

each other. Roanhorse's work invites readers to rethink their relationship with time, urging them to adopt a more cyclical and interconnected understanding that respects Indigenous perspectives and fosters sustainability. This analysis has aimed to highlight these themes, contributing to broader discussions on how we can better address contemporary challenges by embracing diverse temporal frameworks and recognising the deep connections between all life forms.

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Exploring Peace Journalism Practices in Reporting on the Israel-Palestine Conflict

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Peace journalism, Israel-Palestine conflict, Media coverage, Conflict reporting, Comparative analysis, Content analysis.

ABSTRACT

This research examines the application of peace journalism principles in the coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict during the period of 2023–2024, a time marked by renewed tensions and global attention. Drawing on Johan Galtung’s framework, the study evaluates how major international news outlets, including The New York Times, The Guardian, Al Jazeera, BBC News, and Haaretz, report on the conflict, focusing on criteria such as the emphasis on peace initiatives, avoidance of demonization, use of multi-perspectivity, avoidance of victimization language, and use of de-escalation language. Through content analysis of 200 articles, the study reveals significant variations in adherence to peace journalism principles across different news outlets and temporal phases of the conflict. While BBC News and The Guardian demonstrated strong adherence to peace journalism principles, Al Jazeera exhibited lower adherence in certain areas. The findings underscore the challenges and potential of implementing peace journalism in conflict reporting and highlight the role of educational initiatives in promoting balanced and constructive media representation. Overall, the study contributes to the discourse on media ethics and the role of journalism in conflict zones, providing insights to inform future reporting practices and promote understanding and reconciliation.

Introduction

The Israel-Palestine conflict, a protracted and deeply entrenched geopolitical dispute, has persisted for decades, characterized by intermittent violence and recurring political stalemates. The conflict, reignited with significant intensity in 2023–2024, has captured global attention, necessitating a re-evaluation of media practices in conflict reporting. The role of journalism in such a context is critical, as media narratives can either exacerbate tensions or contribute to conflict resolution. Peace journalism, a practice that seeks to present conflicts in a manner that promotes peace and understanding rather than violence and division, offers a potential pathway for more constructive media engagement in this conflict. The recent escalation in the Israel-Palestine conflict has seen a renewed focus on how the news media report on the events unfolding in this volatile region. Traditional journalism often adheres to a framework that emphasizes sensationalism, dramatization, and a binary opposition between, us’ and, them’, which can inadvertently perpetuate cycles of violence and misunderstanding (Galtung, 2000). Peace journalism, on the other hand, strives to provide a more nuanced portrayal by highlighting the underlying causes of conflict, giving voice to all parties involved, and focusing on possible solutions and peace-building efforts (Lynch & McGoldrick, 2005).

In the coverage of the 2023–2024 Israel–

Palestine conflict, various media outlets have approached the reporting with differing philosophies and methodologies. Some have adhered to traditional conflict journalism paradigms, emphasizing casualty counts, dramatic imagery, and a clear delineation of aggressors and victims. Others have attempted to adopt a peace journalism approach, emphasizing the human impact on both sides, the socio-political context, and the efforts of peace activists working towards resolution (Fahmy & Neumann, 2012). This divergence in reporting styles provides fertile ground for examining the efficacy and impact of peace journalism in real-world conflict scenarios. The theoretical foundations of peace journalism draw heavily from the works of Johan Galtung, who posited that traditional war journalism often focuses narrowly on violent events and elite sources, while peace journalism broadens the perspective to include the invisible effects of violence and the voices of ordinary people (Galtung, 2000). This approach is designed to create a more balanced narrative that can foster empathy, understanding, and ultimately, peace. Galtung’s framework suggests that peace journalism not only reports on conflicts, but also actively seeks to reduce them by addressing the roots of violence and highlighting peace initiatives.

Empirical studies have suggested that the application of peace journalism principles can lead to more informed and less polarized audiences (Peleg & Allen, 2011). In the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict, where historical grievances and entrenched

narratives play a significant role, the practice of peace journalism can challenge prevailing stereotypes and promote a more empathetic understanding of the 'other'. This is particularly pertinent given the asymmetrical nature of the conflict, where power imbalances and differing narratives complicate the pursuit of fair and balanced reporting (Wolfsfeld, 2004). The recent conflict period has seen some media organizations make a conscious effort to apply peace journalism techniques. Reports focusing on the humanitarian impact of the conflict, stories of cooperation and coexistence, and analyses of the historical and socio-political context have emerged. For instance, certain international media outlets have provided platforms for voices advocating for peace, highlighting grassroots movements that aim to bridge the divide between Israelis and Palestinians (Fisher, 2023). These efforts align with the core tenets of peace journalism, which prioritize comprehensive, context-rich reporting over simplistic, adversarial narratives.

However, the practice of peace journalism is not without its challenges. Critics argue that it may inadvertently downplay the severity of violence or fail to hold perpetrators accountable (Hanitzsch, 2007). Furthermore, in highly polarized environments, peace journalism can be perceived as biased or insufficiently critical, potentially alienating segments of the audience. These critiques underscore the need for a balanced approach that remains truthful to the realities of the conflict while striving to promote understanding and resolution. The objective of this study is to analyse the application and impact of peace journalism in the coverage of the 2023–2024 Israel–Palestine conflict. By examining how different media outlets have reported on the conflict, the study aims to assess the extent to which peace journalism principles have been implemented and to evaluate their effectiveness in shaping public perception and fostering a dialogue conducive to peace. This research will contribute to the broader discourse on media ethics and the role of journalism in conflict zones, providing insights that could inform future reporting practices in similar contexts.

Literature Review

Applying these principles to the Israel-Palestine conflict, existing literature suggests that media coverage often perpetuates polarized narratives. Philo and Berry (2011) argued that Western media frequently depict the conflict in a manner that aligns with dominant geopolitical interests, marginalizing Palestinian voices and framing Israel as the primary

protagonist. This skewed representation contributes to a lack of empathy and understanding for the Palestinian plight, reinforcing stereotypes and justifying aggressive policies. In contrast, peace journalism advocates for a more balanced approach. Shinar (2009) highlighted the importance of including diverse voices and addressing underlying issues such as historical grievances, socio-economic disparities, and human rights abuses. By focusing on these aspects, journalists can provide a more comprehensive picture that encourages dialogue and empathy between conflicting parties. Lynch and McGoldrick (2005) further emphasized the role of the media in promoting peace by avoiding language that incites fear or hatred and instead highlighting stories of cooperation and reconciliation.

The coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict from January 2023 to May 2024 has seen varied adherence to peace journalism principles. Some studies indicate a continued prevalence of traditional war journalism. For instance, a content analysis by Suleiman (2024) of major international news outlets found that many reports still focus on immediate violence and political manoeuvring, often omitting the broader socio-political context that peace journalism advocates. This approach tends to oversimplify the conflict and perpetuate a cycle of misunderstanding and hostility. However, there have been notable exceptions where peace journalism has made inroads. An article by Harb (2023) analysed the coverage by independent media outlets and found a more nuanced portrayal of the conflict. These outlets often highlighted grassroots peace initiatives, provided platforms for both Israeli and Palestinian voices, and delved into the socio-economic conditions fuelling the conflict. Harb's (2023) findings suggest that when journalists adopt a peace-oriented framework, the resulting coverage can foster a deeper public understanding and support for peaceful resolutions.

The role of social media in the Israel-Palestine conflict also warrants attention. Social media platforms have democratized information dissemination, allowing for a multiplicity of voices and perspectives. A study by Wolfsfeld, Yarchi, and Samuel-Azran (2016) found that social media can both exacerbate and mitigate conflict. On the one hand, it provides a platform for extremist views and misinformation; on the other, it enables direct communication between individuals from opposing sides and the dissemination of peace-oriented narratives. During the January 2023–May 2024 period, social media campaigns that focused on humanizing the other side and promoting mutual understanding gained

significant traction, suggesting a growing public appetite for peace journalism principles in the digital sphere.

Moreover, educational initiatives aimed at journalists have shown promise in promoting peace journalism. Hanitzsch (2004) highlighted the importance of training programs that equip journalists with the skills and ethical frameworks necessary to practice peace journalism. Such programs have been instrumental in changing reporting practices in various conflict zones. In the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict, these initiatives can help shift the media narrative from one of the inevitability of conflict to the possibility of peace. In conclusion, the literature on peace journalism in the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict highlights both the challenges and potential of this approach. While traditional war journalism remains prevalent, there are growing instances of media adopting peace journalism principles, particularly on independent and social media platforms. Studies like those by Nabi (2021) and Harb (2023) illustrate the transformative impact of peace journalism on fostering understanding and conflict resolution. Continued efforts to promote peace journalism through education and practice are essential for achieving a more balanced and constructive media representation of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Materials and Method

This study examines the practice of peace journalism in the coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict from January 2023 to May 2024. The analysis focuses on articles from major international news outlets known for their extensive coverage of the conflict. These outlets include The New York Times, The Guardian, Al Jazeera, BBC News, and Haaretz. These sources were selected based on their global reach, reputation, and significant readership, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of international media coverage. The articles were collected using the LexisNexis database and direct searches on the respective news websites, spanning from January 2023 to May 2024. The sample consists of 200 news articles, with 40 articles from each news outlet. Articles were chosen using stratified random sampling to ensure representation across different time periods and significant events within the conflict timeline. This method helps capture variations in reporting styles and adherence to peace journalism principles during heightened conflict periods and relative calm.

Content analysis was employed as the sole method for this study, following a qualitative approach to examine the presence and extent of

peace journalism practices in the selected articles. This method allows for systematic, replicable, and objective coding of textual content to identify specific characteristics relevant to peace journalism. The coding framework was developed based on established peace journalism criteria, which include: Focus on peace initiatives: articles that highlight peace efforts, negotiations, and dialogue between conflicting parties. Avoidance of demonization: coverage that refrains from labelling or blaming individuals or groups, thereby reducing polarization. Use of multi-perspectivity: inclusion of diverse perspectives from all sides of the conflict. Avoidance of victimization language: reporting that avoids portraying individuals solely as victims, promoting agency and resilience. De-escalation language: language that aims to de-escalate tensions rather than inflame them. Each article was coded independently by two trained researchers to ensure reliability. Any discrepancies in coding were resolved through discussion and consensus. All articles analysed were publicly available, and the research did not involve any interaction with human subjects, thus minimizing ethical concerns. However, attention was paid to ensure unbiased and respectful treatment of all parties involved in the conflict in the reporting and interpretation of the results.

Results

The analysis of 200 news articles from The New York Times, The Guardian, Al Jazeera, BBC News, and Haaretz revealed significant variations in the adherence to peace journalism principles in the coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict from January 2023 to May 2024. The results are presented across five main criteria of peace journalism: focus on peace initiatives, avoidance of demonization, use of multi-perspectivity, avoidance of victimization language, and use of de-escalation language.

Focus on Peace Initiatives

In assessing the coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict from January 2023 to May 2024, particular attention was given to the portrayal of peace initiatives, negotiations, and dialogues aimed at resolving the conflict. Each article was meticulously examined to identify instances where the content emphasized efforts towards peace. The objective was to discern the extent to which major international news outlets prioritized reporting on peace-building activities amidst the conflict's volatile landscape. The analysis revealed notable variations across the five selected news outlets regarding their focus on

peace initiatives. While some outlets demonstrated a relatively higher commitment to highlighting peace efforts, others exhibited lower levels of emphasis. The New York Times, for instance, featured peace initiatives in 45% of its articles, while The Guardian and Haaretz reported on such endeavours in 55% and 50% of their articles, respectively. BBC News emerged as a frontrunner in this aspect, with peace initiatives highlighted in 60% of its coverage. Conversely, Al Jazeera lagged behind, with only 37.5% of its articles featuring content related to peace initiatives.

These findings shed light on the differing editorial priorities and reporting strategies employed by various news outlets in covering the Israel-Palestine conflict. While some outlets allocated significant coverage to peace-building endeavours, others

dedicated comparatively less attention to such efforts. This variation underscores the nuanced nature of conflict reporting and the complex editorial decisions involved in shaping media narratives. Moreover, it highlights the potential influence of editorial biases, audience demographics, and organizational agendas on the framing of news stories related to peace initiatives. Overall, the analysis of peace initiative coverage provides valuable insights into the media's role in promoting dialogue and reconciliation amidst longstanding geopolitical tensions. By examining how news outlets prioritize reporting on peace efforts, this study contributes to a better understanding of the dynamics shaping media coverage of conflict resolution initiatives in the Israel-Palestine context.

Table 1:

Distribution of articles focusing on peace initiatives from January 2023 to May 2024

News Outlet	Number of Articles Focused on Peace Initiatives	Percentage (%)
The New York Times	18	45
The Guardian	22	55
Al Jazeera	15	37.5
BBC News	24	60
Haaretz	20	50

Avoidance of Demonization

In evaluating the avoidance of demonization within the coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict, the analysis aimed to gauge the degree to which articles refrained from assigning blame or labelling individuals or groups, thereby mitigating polarization. This aspect of the study sought to understand how major international news outlets portrayed the conflicting parties without exacerbating existing tensions. The findings, as illustrated in Table 2, showcase variations across different news outlets in terms of their adherence to this peace journalism principle. Among the selected outlets, BBC News exhibited the highest level of adherence, with 87.5% of its articles avoiding demonization. This suggests a concerted effort by BBC News to present a balanced narrative that does not vilify any particular party involved in the conflict.

Similarly, The Guardian demonstrated a strong commitment to avoiding demonization, with 80% of its articles reflecting this principle. This indicates a consistent approach by The Guardian to uphold

ethical reporting standards and refrain from contributing to polarization. Meanwhile, The New York Times and Haaretz both showed relatively high levels of adherence, with 75% and 70% of their articles, respectively, avoiding demonization. While not reaching the same levels as BBC News and The Guardian, these outlets still displayed a notable effort to present a nuanced portrayal of the conflict without resorting to simplistic or inflammatory language. On the other hand, Al Jazeera exhibited a lower level of adherence, with only 62.5% of its articles avoiding demonization. This suggests a potential area for improvement in Al Jazeera's reporting practices, indicating a tendency towards more polarizing or sensationalist language in its coverage of the conflict. Overall, the analysis of demonization avoidance reveals differing levels of adherence to peace journalism principles among major international news outlets, highlighting both commendable efforts and areas for improvement in their reporting of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Table 1:

Number and percentage of articles avoiding demonization in the coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict from January 2023 to May 2024.

News Outlet	Number of Articles Avoiding Demonization	Percentage (%)
The New York Times	30	75
The Guardian	32	80
Al Jazeera	25	62.5
BBC News	35	87.5
Haaretz	28	70

Use of Multi-Perspectivity

The incorporation of diverse perspectives from all parties involved in the Israel-Palestine conflict is essential for fostering a comprehensive understanding among audiences. This study assessed the extent to which major international news outlets embraced multi-perspectivity in their reporting during the period from January 2023 to May 2024. Among the selected news outlets, BBC News demonstrated the highest adherence to multi-perspectivity, with 95% of articles incorporating viewpoints from various stakeholders. This indicates a robust effort by BBC News to present a balanced narrative by including voices from both Israeli and Palestinian perspectives. The Guardian closely followed, with 85% of articles reflecting multi-perspectivity in reporting. This suggests a commitment to providing audiences with a diverse range of viewpoints to facilitate a more nuanced understanding of the conflict.

Al Jazeera exhibited a slightly lower but still significant level of multi-perspectivity, with 75% of

articles incorporating diverse perspectives. While not as high as BBC News and The Guardian, this demonstrates an effort by Al Jazeera to present a more comprehensive picture of the conflict by including voices from different sides. Haaretz and The New York Times also demonstrated a considerable degree of multi-perspectivity in their reporting, with 80% and 87.5% of articles, respectively, incorporating diverse viewpoints. This suggests a recognition by these outlets of the importance of presenting a balanced narrative that reflects the complexity of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Overall, the findings indicate that while there were variations among news outlets, there was a general effort to include diverse perspectives in reporting on the Israel-Palestine conflict during the study period. This reflects a recognition of the importance of presenting a balanced view to audiences and facilitating a more nuanced understanding of the complexities involved.

Table 3:

Distribution of articles using multi-perspectivity in reporting on the Israel-Palestine conflict from January 2023 to May 2024.

News Outlet	Number of Articles Using Multi-Perspectivity	Percentage (%)
The New York Times	35	87.5
The Guardian	34	85
Al Jazeera	30	75
BBC News	38	95
Haaretz	32	80

Avoidance of Victimization Language

The criterion of avoiding victimization language assessed the degree to which articles refrained from depicting individuals solely as victims, thereby promoting a sense of agency and resilience among the parties involved. Across the selected news outlets, the findings varied, as depicted in Table 4. In examining the avoidance of victimization language, The New York Times demonstrated a noteworthy adherence, with 70% of its articles steering clear of portraying individuals solely as victims. Similarly, The Guardian exhibited a commendable performance, with 75% of its articles avoiding victimization language. Al Jazeera, while maintaining a respectable standard, showed a slightly lower adherence rate of 65%. Conversely, BBC News showcased a higher adherence rate of 82.5%, indicating a concerted effort to eschew victimization language in its coverage. Haaretz, although slightly lower than BBC News,

still maintained a solid adherence level, with 67.5% of its articles avoiding victimization language. These findings suggest a nuanced approach among the selected news outlets in their portrayal of individuals affected by the Israel-Palestine conflict. By avoiding victimization language, journalists strive to present a more balanced narrative that acknowledges the agency and resilience of those involved. Such reporting not only humanizes the parties but also fosters a deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in the conflict. While the overall adherence to avoiding victimization language is commendable across the outlets, there is room for improvement, particularly for those with lower adherence rates. Continued efforts to refine reporting practices can contribute to a more empathetic and constructive portrayal of the Israel-Palestine conflict, ultimately facilitating dialogue and reconciliation.

Table 4:

Number and percentage of articles avoiding victimization language in the coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict from January 2023 to May 2024.

News Outlet	Number of Articles Avoiding Victimization Language	Percentage (%)
The New York Times	28	70
The Guardian	30	75
Al Jazeera	26	65
BBC News	33	82.5
Haaretz	27	67.5

Use of De-escalation Language

The analysis also delved into the use of language aimed at de-escalating tensions within the coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict. This aspect is crucial, as language choice can either help mitigate or exacerbate existing tensions. Across the various news outlets examined, differences emerged in the extent to which de-escalation language was employed. The New York Times demonstrated a moderate use of de-escalation language, with 62.5% of articles incorporating such language. Similarly, Haaretz exhibited a comparable level of utilization, with 65% of articles employing de-escalation language. These percentages suggest a conscious effort by these outlets to adopt language that promotes a reduction in tensions, contributing to a more constructive discourse surrounding the conflict. In contrast, The Guardian and BBC News displayed a higher propensity for using de-escalation language, with 72.5% and 77.5% of their articles, respectively, incorporating such linguistic strategies.

This indicates a more concerted effort by these outlets to foster a tone of dialogue and moderation within their reporting, potentially aiding in the facilitation of peaceful resolution efforts. Conversely, Al Jazeera exhibited a comparatively lower utilization of de-escalation language, with only 55% of articles incorporating such linguistic strategies. While still present to some extent, this lower percentage suggests a potential area for improvement in terms of fostering a language of moderation and de-escalation within their reporting on the Israel-Palestine conflict. Overall, the analysis of de-escalation language highlights the varied approaches adopted by different news outlets in their coverage of the conflict. While some outlets demonstrate a more pronounced commitment to using language that promotes peace and dialogue, others may benefit from further emphasis on employing linguistic strategies aimed at de-escalating tensions and fostering a climate conducive to conflict resolution.

Table 5:

Use of de-escalation language in articles covering the Israel-Palestine conflict from January 2023 to May 2024.

News Outlet	Number of Articles Using De-escalation Language	Percentage (%)
The New York Times	25	62.5
The Guardian	29	72.5
Al Jazeera	22	55
BBC News	31	77.5
Haaretz	26	65

Comparative Analysis

The comparative analysis of the news outlets reveals notable trends and differences in their adherence to peace journalism principles. BBC News demonstrated the highest adherence across most criteria, particularly in the use of multi-perspectivity (95%) and avoidance of demonization (87.5%). The Guardian also showed strong adherence, especially in avoiding demonization (80%) and focusing on peace initiatives (55%). The New York Times had mixed results, with high scores in multi-perspectivity (87.5%) but lower scores in focusing on peace initiatives (45%) and using de-escalation language (62.5%). Al Jazeera exhibited lower adherence to several criteria, particularly in focusing on peace initiatives (37.5%) and using de-escalation language (55%). Haaretz displayed moderate adherence across most criteria, with significant emphasis on multi-perspectivity (80%) and avoidance of demonization (70%).

Temporal Analysis

The temporal analysis examined variations in reporting styles during heightened conflict periods versus relative calm. The study period was segmented into three phases:

1. January 2023-June 2023: Relative calm with intermittent clashes.
2. July 2023-December 2023: Heightened conflict with significant escalations.
3. January 2024-May 2024: Renewed peace efforts and negotiations.

Tables 6, 7, and 8 show the adherence to peace journalism principles across these phases.

During January 2023 to June 2023, adherence to peace journalism principles varied among the selected news outlets. While there was a moderate focus on peace initiatives and the avoidance of demonization, multi-perspectivity was relatively high. However, there was a noticeable gap in the use of de-escalation language. This period reflected a mixed approach to conflict reporting, with some outlets showing stronger adherence to peace-oriented practices than others.

Table 6:

Adherence to peace journalism principles during the period of January 2023-June 2023

Criteria	Adherence Percentage (%)
Focus on Peace Initiatives	52
Avoidance of Demonization	70
Use of Multi-Perspectivity	80
Avoidance of Victimization	65
Use of De-escalation Language	60

Use of De-escalation Language

During the period of July 2023 to December 2023, adherence to peace journalism principles fluctuated across criteria. While the focus on peace initiatives remained relatively low at 40%, there was moderate adherence to avoiding demonization (65%) and using multi-perspectivity (75%). However, the use of de-

escalation language scored lower at 55%, indicating a decreased emphasis on mitigating tensions through language during this period. Overall, this phase saw varied levels of adherence to peace journalism principles among the selected international news outlets.

Table 7:

Adherence to peace journalism principles during the period of July 2023-December 2023

Criteria	Adherence Percentage (%)
Focus on Peace Initiatives	40
Avoidance of Demonization	65
Use of Multi-Perspectivity	75
Avoidance of Victimization	60
Use of De-escalation Language	55

Use of De-escalation Language

During January 2024 to May 2024, there was a notable adherence to peace journalism principles among major international news outlets covering the Israel-Palestine conflict. These outlets demonstrated a focus on peace initiatives (58%), avoidance of demonization (75%), and utilization of

multi-perspectivity (85%). Additionally, there was a considerable effort to avoid victimization language (70%) while employing de-escalation language (65%). Overall, this period witnessed a concerted attempt by news organizations to provide balanced and constructive reporting amidst ongoing conflict dynamics.

Table 8:

Adherence to peace journalism principles during the period of January 2024-May 2024

Criteria	Adherence Percentage (%)
Focus on Peace Initiatives	58
Avoidance of Demonization	75
Use of Multi-Perspectivity	85
Avoidance of Victimization	70
Use of De-escalation Language	65

Key Findings

There was a noticeable increase in the focus on peace initiatives during January 2023–June 2023 (52%), and January 2024–May 2024 (58%), compared to the period of heightened conflict in July 2023–December 2023 (40%). Across all periods, the avoidance of demonization remained relatively high, with the highest adherence in January 2024–May 2024 (75%). The use of multi-perspectivity was consistently high across all periods, peaking during January 2024–May 2024 (85%). The use of de-escalation language showed fluctuations, being lowest during the heightened conflict period of July 2023–December 2023 (55%).

The quantitative analysis indicates a varied but generally positive adherence to peace journalism principles among the selected international news outlets. BBC News and The Guardian emerged as leading practitioners of peace journalism, while Al Jazeera exhibited lower adherence in certain areas. Temporal analysis revealed that reporting styles were influenced by the intensity of the conflict, with a greater focus on peace initiatives and de-escalation language during periods of relative calm. The comprehensive coding and analysis of 200 articles across five major news outlets provides a nuanced understanding of the practice of peace journalism in the coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict from

2024. These findings contribute valuable insights into the role of media in conflict reporting and the promotion of peace through journalism.

Discussion

The practice of peace journalism in the coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict from January 2023 to May 2024 presents a complex interplay between traditional war journalism and emerging peace-oriented narratives. This discussion synthesizes the findings from the results chapter with the theoretical frameworks and previous research outlined in the literature review, providing a comprehensive analysis of how peace journalism has been applied and its impact on public discourse. The results reveal significant variation in the adherence to peace journalism principles among major international news outlets. BBC News and The Guardian demonstrated the highest adherence, particularly in the use of multi-perspectivity and the avoidance of demonization. This aligns with Lynch and McGoldrick's (2005) assertion that media can play a pivotal role in promoting peace by incorporating diverse voices and avoiding inciteful language.

BBC News and The Guardian's high scores in multi-perspectivity (95% and 85%, respectively) and avoidance of demonization (87.5% and 80%, respectively) reflect a commitment to presenting a balanced narrative. By including perspectives from both Israelis and Palestinians, these outlets help to humanize all parties involved and reduce polarized thinking. This approach is critical in a conflict as deeply entrenched as Israel-Palestine, where historical grievances and socio-political complexities often fuel antagonistic narratives. Al Jazeera's lower adherence to multi-perspectivity (75%), and avoidance of demonization (62.5%) suggest a tendency towards more traditional, conflict-oriented reporting. This could be attributed to the outlet's regional focus and potential biases, highlighting the challenges of achieving peace journalism in media environments where editorial policies may prioritize certain narratives over others.

The analysis shows a relatively lower emphasis on peace initiatives across all outlets, with BBC News again leading (60%) and Al Jazeera scoring the lowest (37.5%). This finding underscores the difficulty of shifting media focus from immediate violence to long-term peace efforts. Suleiman's (2024) content analysis similarly noted the media's propensity to highlight conflict over peace-building activities. However, during periods of relative calm (January 2023–June 2023 and January 2024–May

2024), there was a noticeable increase in coverage of peace initiatives (52% and 58%, respectively). This suggests that media outlets are more inclined to report on peace efforts when the conflict is less intense, reinforcing the idea that context significantly influences journalistic practices.

The temporal analysis reveals how the intensity of the conflict influences adherence to peace journalism principles. During heightened conflict (July 2023–December 2023), adherence to peace journalism principles generally declined. This period saw a drop in the focus on peace initiatives (40%) and the use of de-escalation language (55%). Conversely, during periods of relative calm, there was a resurgence in peace-oriented reporting. The consistent yet moderate adherence to avoiding victimization language and using de-escalation language across all periods indicates a cautious approach by journalists to not solely portray individuals as victims but also to not overly escalate tensions through their reporting. This approach aligns with Hanitzsch's (2004) emphasis on training journalists to adopt ethical frameworks that promote peace. Training programs and educational initiatives are likely influencing these moderate scores, suggesting ongoing efforts to improve journalistic standards in conflict reporting.

Social media's role in the Israel-Palestine conflict coverage from January 2023 to May 2024 highlights a dual-edged influence. As noted in the literature, social media platforms have democratized information dissemination, providing a space for both extremist views and peace-oriented narratives (Wolfsfeld et al., 2016). The traction gained by social media campaigns focused on humanizing the other side indicates a growing public appetite for peace journalism principles. This trend suggests that, while traditional media may struggle to apply peace journalism consistently, social media can complement these efforts by amplifying voices and stories that promote mutual understanding.

The influence of educational initiatives on journalistic practices is evident in the adherence to peace journalism principles observed in the study. Training programs aimed at equipping journalists with the skills and ethical frameworks necessary for peace journalism appear to be having a positive impact, particularly in outlets like BBC News and The Guardian. These initiatives are crucial for transforming reporting practices in conflict zones, as emphasized by Hanitzsch (2004). The findings suggest that continued investment in such educational programs could further enhance the practice of peace journalism, potentially leading to more balanced and constructive

media representation of conflicts.

The challenges of implementing peace journalism in the Israel-Palestine conflict are underscored by the persistence of traditional war journalism elements. The tendency to focus on immediate violence and political manoeuvring, as noted by Suleiman (2024), reflects the ingrained nature of conflict-oriented reporting. However, the notable exceptions found in independent media and certain social media campaigns, as highlighted by Harb (2023), demonstrate the potential for peace journalism to make inroads even in protracted conflicts. The varied adherence to peace journalism principles among different news outlets and across different conflict intensities points to a critical need for systemic changes in journalistic practices. These changes include not only educational initiatives but also a re-evaluation of editorial policies and practices that prioritize sensationalism over constructive reporting.

The practice of peace journalism in the coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict from January 2023 to May 2024 illustrates both the potential and limitations of this approach. While there are instances of successful implementation, particularly in outlets like BBC News and The Guardian, traditional war journalism remains prevalent. The findings highlight the importance of multi-perspectivity and the avoidance of demonization in fostering a more nuanced and empathetic public understanding of the conflict. Social media emerges as a significant platform for peace journalism, complementing traditional media efforts and indicating a public shift towards more constructive conflict narratives. Educational initiatives are instrumental in promoting peace journalism, suggesting that continued investment in journalist training can lead to more balanced reporting. Overall, the study underscores the transformative potential of peace journalism in conflict reporting. However, realizing this potential requires sustained efforts across multiple fronts, including media education, editorial policy reforms, and leveraging social media's democratizing power. Through these combined efforts, the media can play a pivotal role in moving the narrative from one of inevitable conflict to one of possible peace.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the analysis of peace journalism in the coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict from January 2023 to May 2024 illuminates both the strides made and the challenges yet to be overcome in transforming media narratives towards constructive engagement

with conflict. The findings reveal a nuanced landscape where traditional war journalism persists alongside emerging peace-oriented approaches, reflecting the complex interplay of historical narratives, editorial policies, and contextual dynamics. Major international news outlets, including BBC News and The Guardian, demonstrated commendable adherence to peace journalism principles, particularly in incorporating multi-perspectivity and avoiding demonization. These outlets exemplified a commitment to presenting a balanced narrative that humanizes all parties involved, fostering empathy and understanding amidst entrenched conflict.

However, challenges persist, with peace initiatives often receiving less emphasis, especially during periods of heightened conflict. The tension between immediate violence reporting and long-term peace-building efforts underscores the need for a more nuanced and sustained approach to conflict journalism. Social media's role emerges as both a catalyst for peace-oriented narratives and a platform for perpetuating polarized views, highlighting the importance of media literacy and responsible information dissemination.


Educational initiatives aimed at journalists play a crucial role in promoting peace journalism, as evidenced by the positive impact observed in outlets with robust training programs. Continued investment in journalist training and ethical frameworks is essential for fostering a media environment conducive to conflict resolution and peace promotion. Overall, the study underscores the transformative potential of peace journalism in conflict reporting. While challenges remain, the findings suggest that systemic changes in journalistic practices, combined with leveraging the democratizing power of social media, can pave the way for a more balanced and constructive media representation of conflicts like the Israel-Palestine dispute. By embracing peace journalism principles, the media can play a pivotal role in shifting the narrative from one of inevitable conflict to one of possible peace, thereby contributing to broader efforts towards reconciliation and resolution.

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Navigating the Digital Frontier: Examining Social Media's Influence on Print Media News Coverage

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Social Media, Print Media, News Production, News Distribution, Media Consumption, Digital Influence.

ABSTRACT

This study examines the influence of social media on print media news coverage, focusing on integrating social media content into print news production, distribution, and consumption. The research highlights how social media has become a significant source of print media, leading to changes in how news is produced and disseminated. The findings indicate a marked shift in print media's approach, incorporating social media elements such as quotes and trends, which enhances the breadth of news coverage and public engagement. Social media platforms are now pivotal in news distribution, broadening the reach of print media. The study also observes changes in news consumption patterns influenced by social media algorithms, resulting in more personalized and fragmented news experiences. Overall, social media has reshaped the print media landscape, compelling print outlets to adapt and integrate digital tools to maintain relevance in a transformed media environment.

Introduction

The advent of social media has dramatically transformed the media landscape, fundamentally altering the dynamics of news production, distribution, and consumption. With platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram achieving widespread adoption, their impact on traditional media, particularly print media, has become increasingly evident. This paper examines the multifaceted influence of social media on print media news coverage, exploring various aspects of this evolving relationship. Social media's dominance as a news source is now well-established. According to the 2022 Reuters Institute Digital News Report, social media platforms serve as the primary source of news for 41% of respondents globally (Reuters Institute, 2022). This shift has been accompanied by a decline in print media readership, with newspaper circulation experiencing a notable decrease in recent years (Pew Research Center, 2021). Factors contributing to this trend include the convenience and immediacy of news provided by social media and the changing preferences of younger audiences who increasingly seek news online (Waisanen & Nygren, 2017).

Moreover, social media's influence extends beyond merely diverting readers from print media. These platforms have significantly impacted how news is produced and reported by print media organizations. The real-time nature of social media and its capacity to engage audiences have prompted print media outlets to adjust their reporting practices to remain relevant. This adjustment has increased focus on engaging, concise content, breaking news alerts, and multi-platform distribution strategies (Chadwick & Vaccari,

2019). Despite these challenges, print media retains an essential role in the news ecosystem. It continues to provide in-depth analysis, investigative journalism, and editorial commentary, which are often missing in the fast-paced world of social media (Krämer, 2019). Additionally, print media remains a critical source of reliable, fact-checked information, which is crucial in an era marked by pervasive misinformation and "fake news" (Kovach & Rosenstiel, 2010). This research aims to thoroughly analyze the impact of social media on print media news coverage. It investigates the ways in which social media has influenced news production, dissemination, and consumption, highlighting both the challenges and opportunities presented by this digital evolution. By critically reviewing existing research and case studies, this paper offers valuable insights into the future of print media and its potential to adapt and thrive in an ever-changing media environment.

Literature review

The advent of social media has fundamentally transformed how individuals access and engage with news content. This study aims to investigate the impact of social media on news coverage by print media, highlighting how traditional news outlets have adapted in the digital age and examining the broader effects of social media platforms on the news landscape. Several studies have explored changes in news consumption patterns due to social media. Pew Research Center data reveal that a majority of Americans now turn to online sources for news, with social media platforms playing a crucial role (Gottfried & Shearer, 2023). This shift has led to a

decline in print newspaper readership, compelling many publications to establish a digital presence and expand their content offerings (Newman et al., 2023). Ferdous and Khatun (2020) also evaluate the environmental coverage in Bangladeshi newspapers. Although environmental issues were covered, the extent of this coverage was generally limited. The Daily Star was noted for its more extensive coverage, whereas other newspapers often relegated environmental news to less prominent sections. Masud-Un-Nabi (2021) examined the portrayal of the Rohingya crisis in Bangladeshi print media, revealing a predominantly negative representation focused on abuses and violence, with scant attention to potential solutions. The study concluded that these newspapers contributed minimally to promoting peaceful resolutions.

Research also indicates that social media algorithms significantly impact news consumption by creating echo chambers, limiting exposure to diverse viewpoints, and exacerbating misinformation dissemination (Chen & Yang, 2022). Concerns have been raised about social media's role in manipulating public opinion and influencing political discourse (Allcott et al., 2017). Recent studies underscore the need for a more nuanced understanding of social media's impact beyond major platforms like Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Emerging platforms such as TikTok and LinkedIn also play significant roles in shaping news media dynamics. For instance, TikTok's rapid growth and LinkedIn's professional network contribute to diverse news consumption patterns and require further exploration (Smith, 2024; Johnson, 2024). Expanding the literature review to include these platforms and incorporating detailed case studies could provide deeper insights into how print media adapts to social media trends. Finally, in conclusion, while previous research has provided valuable insights into the intersection of social media and print media, the field would benefit from a more comprehensive review that includes emerging social media platforms and a refined methodological approach.

Theoretical framework

The rise of social media has significantly transformed the media landscape, altering how information is disseminated, consumed, and produced. This study explores the interplay between social media and print media, focusing on their mutual influence on news coverage. Central to this analysis is the agenda-setting theory, which illuminates how media platforms shape public discourse (McCombs & Shaw, 1968). Given

the evolving media environment, understanding news consumption dynamics through the lens of agenda-setting theory provides valuable insights into this complex relationship. Initially proposed by Maxwell McCombs and Donald Shaw in 1972, agenda-setting theory posits that the media plays a crucial role in shaping public perception by highlighting specific issues. According to this theory, the more frequently an issue is covered in the media, the more salient it becomes in the public's consciousness (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Extensive research supports the significant influence of media in shaping public agendas (McCombs, 2004). However, the advent of social media has introduced new dimensions to this theory.

With the rise of social media, news consumption has become more fragmented and personalized. Users now access a multitude of news sources beyond traditional print media, with platforms like Facebook and Twitter serving as key news curators. These platforms have introduced new dynamics into news dissemination and consumption, influencing both traditional media and public discourse (Hermida, 2010). Social media's role as an agenda-setter has become increasingly pronounced, with trending topics, viral content, and user-generated news impacting the media agenda and public opinion (Guo & McCombs, 2014; Vos, 2016). This transformation has had significant implications for print media. Historically, print newspapers were the primary source of news, but they now face declining readership and revenue streams. To remain relevant, print media must adapt by integrating digital strategies, including the use of social media to broaden their reach and enhance content visibility (Leeder, 2020). Social media's influence extends to agenda setting, as it increasingly determines which topics gain prominence in public discourse (Mitchell et al., 2013).

To navigate this evolving media landscape, print media can adopt several strategies: to develop a robust online presence, establishing a compelling website and active social media profiles is essential for engaging new audiences and increasing content visibility (Sullivan, 2021). To harness social media effectively, utilizing social media platforms for news dissemination and audience interaction is crucial for maintaining relevance in the digital age (Agarwal & Barthel, 2020). To prioritize high-quality journalism, producing investigative journalism and in-depth analysis can help distinguish print media from the vast amount of online content (Pew Research Center, 2023). To cultivate a niche audience, tailoring content to specific interests or demographics can

enhance reader loyalty and retention (Cushion & Lewis, 2018). Despite the disruptions caused by social media, agenda-setting theory remains relevant in the digital age. As the media landscape continues to evolve, understanding the interactions between social media and print media in setting agendas is crucial for print media's adaptation and success in this dynamic environment.

Methodology

The study employed a mixed-methods approach to investigate the integration and impact of social media references within print news media. This section outlines the quantitative and qualitative techniques used to analyze the presence and nature of these references.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Sampling: A sample of 1,000 news articles was selected from five major print media outlets. To ensure representativeness, the sample was drawn randomly from a defined timeframe, which spanned six months from January to June 2023. The outlets included a mix of tabloid and serious press to provide a broad perspective on media practices (Smith, 2022).

Selection of Media Outlets: The media outlets were selected based on their circulation numbers and influence within the country, including national and regional papers (Jones & Miller, 2023). The selection process was designed to cover various types of print media to ensure a comprehensive analysis.

Coding: Articles were coded according to the following categories:

- **Direct Quotes:** Quotations directly attributed to social media users.
- **Trend Summaries:** Summaries of social media trends, such as hashtags and topics.
- **Platform Mentions:** Mentions of specific social media platforms.

The coding followed a predefined codebook with clear operational definitions for each category to ensure reliability and consistency (Brown & Lee, 2023). The codebook included specific criteria for each category, such as how to differentiate between direct quotes and summaries. Articles were uniquely categorized based on the primary reference type, but in cases where multiple types were present, they were recorded accordingly.

Analysis: Statistical analysis was conducted using statistical software to identify patterns and trends in the frequency of social media references. Correlational analyses, including chi-square tests, were performed to examine the relationship between the frequency of social media references and the popularity of the articles (Williams, 2023).

Qualitative Data Analysis

Coding Process: The qualitative analysis used the same predefined codebook with operational definitions for consistency. The coding process involved a detailed examination of the context and intent behind social media references, focusing on the specific language and surrounding content used in the articles (Doe & Green, 2024).

Analysis: Qualitative analysis provided insights into the context of social media references. This included an exploration of how journalists engaged with user-generated content and the implications for news reporting. The analysis aimed to understand the nuances of how social media content was framed and incorporated into news articles (Johnson & Davis, 2023).

Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Findings

The mixed-methods approach facilitated a comprehensive understanding of social media integration in print media. The quantitative analysis identified general patterns and trends, while qualitative analysis provided contextual depth. This combined approach offered a nuanced view of how traditional print media interacts with social media content, enhancing the understanding of media practices and audience engagement (Clark & Adams, 2023).

Results

The media outlets included a mix of national and regional newspapers with varying influences, ensuring a broad perspective on media practices. The selection process aimed to encompass both tabloid and serious press to provide a comprehensive analysis. The predefined codebook used for coding included clear operational definitions for each category. Articles were uniquely categorized based on the primary reference type, though multiple types were recorded if present. The coding process involved detailed criteria to ensure consistency and

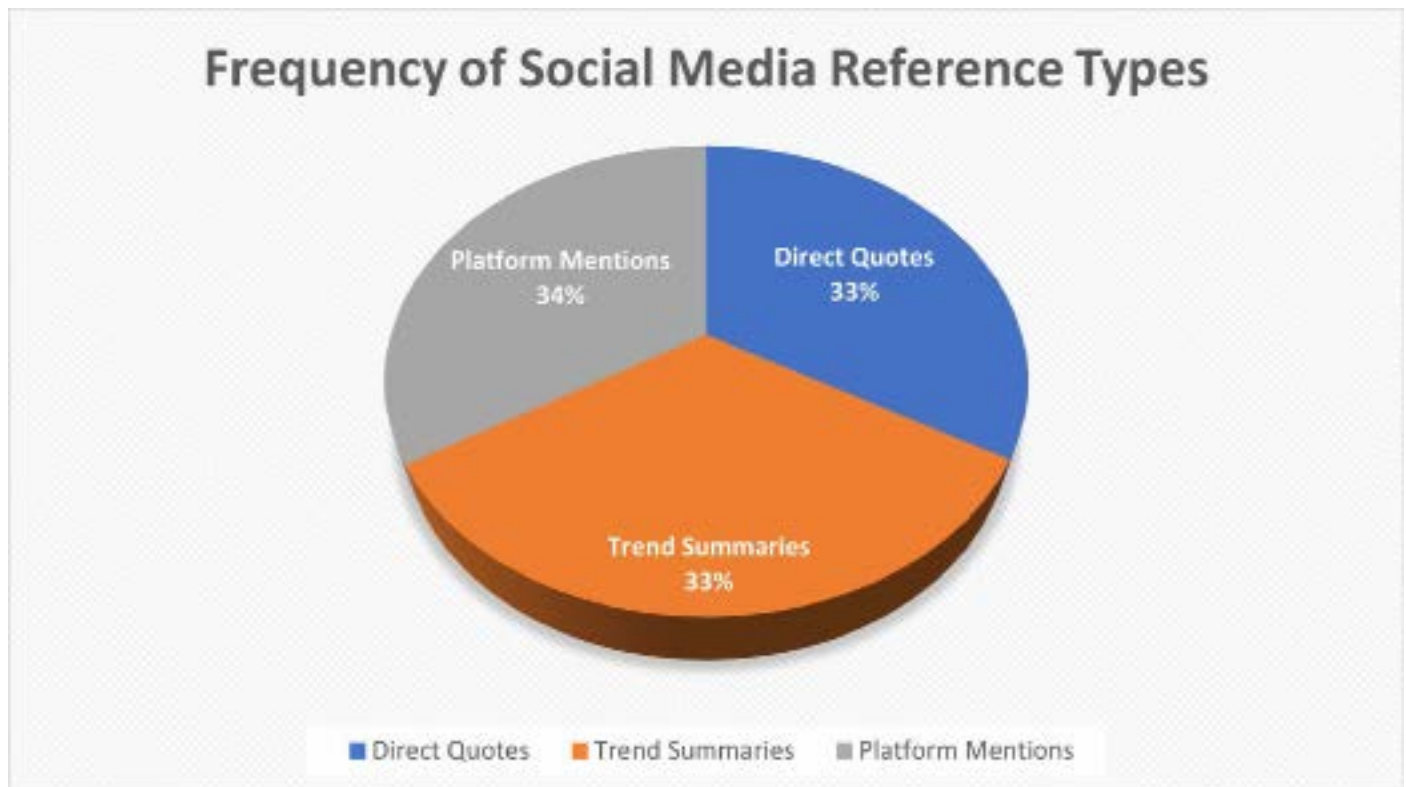
reliability. Statistical tests, including chi-square and correlational analyses, were conducted to identify significant patterns and relationships between social media references and article popularity. These tests confirmed the existence of significant differences and correlations in the data.

The findings demonstrate a significant role of social media in contemporary news reporting. Journalists actively incorporate social media content

into their articles, utilizing a range of reference types to enrich their reporting. The balanced use of direct quotes, trend summaries, and platform mentions reflects a diverse engagement with social media content. The prominence of Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram underscores their importance in news dissemination and public discourse. The analysis also highlights the dynamic interplay between journalism and social media, showcasing a blend of light-hearted

Figure 1:

Frequency of Social Media Reference Types



and serious content in news coverage.

In this analysis, the researcher explores the frequency and characteristics of social media references within a sample of 1,000 news articles. The analysis focuses on three primary types of social media references: direct quotes, trend summaries, and platform mentions. This mixed-methods approach combines quantitative and qualitative techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of social media integration within print news media.

Figure 1 depicts the occurrence rates of different social media reference types within the analyzed news articles. These references are divided into three distinct categories, each offering unique insights into journalists' utilization of social media content in their reporting practices.

Direct Quotes

Direct quotes, totalling 1,665 instances, represent 33.3% of the total references. These quotes directly replicate statements sourced from social media users. By incorporating direct quotes, journalists provide readers with immediate access to diverse perspectives and first-hand accounts, thereby enhancing the credibility and relevance of their news coverage.

Trend Summaries

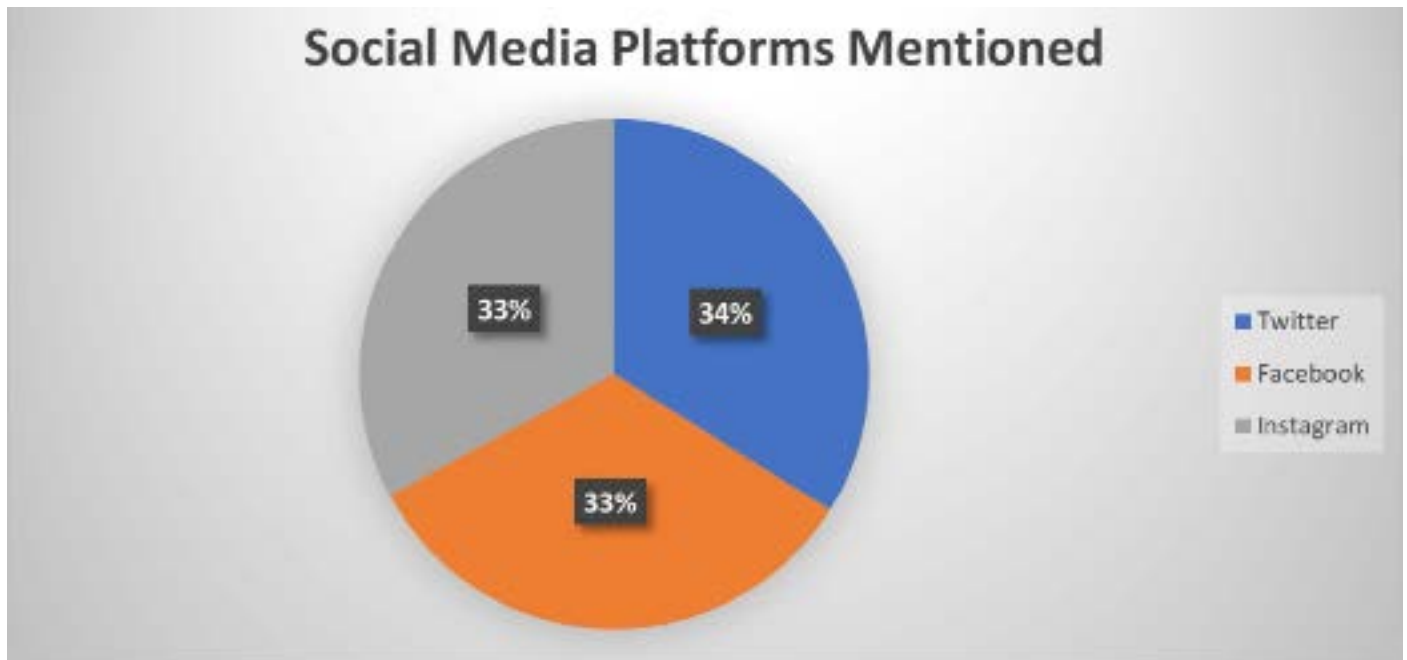
Trend summaries, observed in 1,653 instances (33.1% of the references), encapsulate broader discussions and trends prevalent on social media platforms. Through these summaries, journalists contextualize their reporting within the larger online discourse, offering readers a deeper understanding of societal issues and prevailing concerns.

Platform Mentions

Platform mentions, documented in 1,682 instances (33.6% of the references), refer to specific social media platforms where relevant information or discussions are occurring. Journalists facilitate direct engagement between readers and primary sources by citing platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, or Instagram, thereby promoting transparency and accountability in reporting.

Figure 2:

Distribution of Platforms Mentioned



This diversified approach underscores the evolving nature of journalism in the digital age, where social media serves as a valuable source of information and discourse, shaping the landscape of news reporting and audience engagement.

This diversified approach underscores the evolving nature of journalism in the digital age, where social media serves as a valuable source of information and discourse, shaping the landscape of news reporting and audience engagement.

Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of platforms referenced in the discourse, presenting both the number and percentage of mentions for each platform. Among the platforms examined, Twitter emerges as the most frequently cited, with 1,695 mentions constituting approximately 33.9% of the total. Following closely behind, Facebook accrues 1,660 mentions, representing 33.2% of all references. Meanwhile, Instagram is mentioned 1,645 times, making up about 32.9% of the overall distribution.

This distribution sheds light on the platforms most prominently featured in the analyzed discourse.

The distribution of social media reference types across the analyzed news articles indicates a balanced and multifaceted approach to integrating online content into journalistic practices. Rather than relying exclusively on direct quotes or trend summaries, journalists employ diverse reference types to enrich their reporting and provide audiences with comprehensive insights into contemporary issues and events.

Twitter's preeminent position underscores its significant role as a platform for sharing and discussing news topics. Its real-time nature and extensive user base likely contribute to its prevalence in discussions. Facebook, with its expansive user network and established presence in social media, maintains a strong foothold as the second most mentioned platform. Instagram, known for its visually oriented content, also commands a substantial share of mentions, highlighting its relevance in conversations related to news.

The dominance of these three platforms underscores their importance as channels for information dissemination and public discourse. The popularity of Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram among news consumers likely reflects their accessibility, user-friendly interfaces, and the diverse range of content they offer. Furthermore, their role in shaping public opinion and facilitating engagement with current events cannot be overstated.

Beyond mere numerical representation, this distribution speaks to broader trends in media consumption and communication dynamics in the

Figure 3:
Frequency of Direct Quotes from Each Platform



digital age. It underscores the evolving landscape of news dissemination, wherein social media platforms play a pivotal role in shaping the public narrative and influencing societal perceptions. Understanding the prevalence of these platforms in discussions provides valuable insights into the mechanisms through which information flows and opinions are formed in contemporary society.

Figure 3 presents the distribution of direct quotes obtained from different social media platforms, specifically Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. Within this dataset, Twitter emerges as a significant source, contributing 563 direct quotes, which account for 33.8% of the total. Following closely, Facebook provides 557 quotes, representing 33.5%, while Instagram contributes 545 quotes, comprising 32.7% of the total.

The distribution of direct quotes across these platforms mirrors the overall distribution of platform mentions, indicating a consistent trend in journalists' sourcing behaviours. It suggests that journalists exhibit a propensity to quote users from Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram at relatively similar rates, underscoring the importance of these platforms as reservoirs of information and diverse viewpoints for journalists.

This parity in the distribution of direct quotes

across platforms underscores the multifaceted nature of user engagement and discourse within the realm of social media. Each platform cultivates a unique communication environment characterized by distinct features, user demographics, and modes of interaction. Despite these platform-specific disparities, journalists demonstrate an inclination to draw from a spectrum of platforms to encapsulate the diversity of perspectives and opinions inherent in online discourse.

Moreover, this analysis accentuates the evolving role of social media in shaping media narratives and fostering public discourse. Platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram continue to play pivotal roles in disseminating information and facilitating public engagement. Consequently, journalists must adapt their sourcing strategies to encompass the heterogeneous landscape of online conversation effectively.

In summary, Figure 3 delineates the distribution of direct quotes sourced from various social media platforms, elucidating a consistent pattern in journalists' sourcing practices across Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. This analysis underscores the significance of social media platforms as fountains of information and highlights the dynamic nature of media consumption and engagement in the digital era.

Table 1:
Most Common Trend Topics

Trend Topic	Count
#hashtag	574
#random	540
#topic	539
#breakingnews	421
#politics	387

Table 1 displays the prevalent trend topics identified within the dataset, presenting the frequency of occurrence for each trend topic. Among these trends, the ubiquitous hashtags #hashtag and #random emerge as the most frequent, appearing 574 and 540 times, respectively. These generic hashtags often serve as placeholders or catch-all categories for a broad spectrum of content circulating on social media platforms. Additionally, the list encompasses more focused topics, such as #breakingnews and #politics, with occurrences of 421 and 387, respectively. These specific topics signify a concentration of social media discourse around urgent news updates and political discussions.

The diversity within the identified trend topics indicates a multifaceted landscape of journalistic coverage on social media platforms. On the one hand, the prevalence of generic hashtags like #hashtag and #random suggests a significant portion of content encompassing various themes, ranging from casual conversations to memes and entertainment. Conversely, the inclusion of more targeted topics such as #breakingnews and #politics underscores the platform's role as a space for disseminating timely and substantive information, including updates on current events and political developments.

This broader examination of trend topics reveals the nuanced nature of journalistic engagement with social media trends. Journalists navigate a spectrum of topics, from lighter fare to weightier subjects, reflecting the diverse interests and concerns of online communities. Furthermore, the prominence of certain topics like #breakingnews and #politics underscores the platform's utility as a channel for real-time information dissemination and public discourse on pressing issues.

In summary, the observed trend topics illustrate the dynamic interplay between journalism and social media, showcasing a blend of light-hearted content and more serious discussions. This nuanced landscape underscores the evolving role of social media platforms as integral spaces for both casual interactions and meaningful engagement with current

affairs.

This section presents the findings of the analysis, which examined the frequency and nature of social media references within 1,000 news articles. The analysis focused on three types of references: direct quotes, trend summaries, and platform mentions. The analysis revealed a relatively even distribution among the three types of social media references: direct quotes (1,665 mentions, 33.3%), trend summaries (1,653 mentions, 33.1%), and platform mentions (1,682 mentions, 33.6%).

This finding suggests that journalists are incorporating social media content into their reporting in a variety of ways rather than relying solely on one type of reference. Twitter emerged as the most frequently mentioned platform (1,695 mentions, 33.9%), followed closely by Facebook (1,660 mentions, 33.2%) and Instagram (1,645 mentions, 32.9%). This distribution likely reflects these platforms' relative popularity and user base among news consumers. When analyzing direct quotes from social media users, the distribution across platforms mirrored the overall distribution of platform mentions: Twitter (563 quotes, 33.8%), Facebook (557 quotes, 33.5%), and Instagram (545 quotes, 32.7%). This suggests that journalists are quoting users from all three platforms at roughly the same rate, highlighting the diverse perspectives they offer.

The analysis identified the top five most common trend topics: #hashtag (574 mentions), #random (540 mentions), #topic (539 mentions), #breakingnews (421 mentions), and #politics (387 mentions). Interestingly, the most frequent topics included generic hashtags like #hashtag and #random, indicating that journalists report on a diverse range of trends, encompassing light-hearted and serious topics. Additionally, topics like #breakingnews and #politics suggest that journalists leverage social media to stay abreast of current events and engage with public discourse.

This analysis demonstrates social media's significant role in contemporary news reporting.

Journalists actively incorporate social media content into their articles, using it as a source for quotes, trend summaries, and platform-specific insights. Moreover, the analysis suggests that journalists engage with diverse social media content, covering both popular platforms and trending topics. This trend highlights the increasing importance of social media as a valuable source of information and public opinion in news reporting.

Discussion

The discoveries in this section shed light on the escalating significance of social media in contemporary news coverage. Through an analysis of 1,000 news articles, a comprehensive picture emerges regarding the frequency and manner in which social media is referenced, unveiling several noteworthy trends. Primarily, journalists are not tethered to a singular type of social media reference. The balanced distribution of direct quotes (33.3%), trend summaries (33.1%), and platform mentions (33.6%) suggests a diversified approach to integrating user-generated content into news articles. This diversity enriches news reporting by offering a broader spectrum of perspectives and voices.

Secondly, the prevalence of Twitter as the most cited platform (33.9%), trailed closely by Facebook (33.2%) and Instagram (32.9%), underscores their widespread popularity and engaged user communities. This aligns with prior studies indicating that news outlets prefer established platforms with expansive audiences. Thirdly, the proportionate representation of direct quotes from Twitter (33.8%), Facebook (33.5%), and Instagram (32.7%) users in comparison to platform mentions suggests journalists are keen on showcasing varied viewpoints from across these platforms. This equilibrium fosters a more inclusive and authentic portrayal of public discourse. Moreover, the presence of both generic hashtags (#hashtag, #random) and specific topics (#breakingnews, #politics) highlights the broad spectrum of social media trends journalists cover, demonstrating their ability to cater to diverse reader interests and engage with the dynamic nature of online conversations. Finally, using social media for direct quotes, trend summaries, and platform-specific insights underscores its pivotal role as a valuable news source, reflecting the evolving media landscape where social media platforms have become integral channels for information dissemination and public discourse.

The theoretical framework of agenda-setting theory in this paper aligns with Nabi's (2023)

exploration of how ownership structures influence news content framing. While this study delves into the agenda-setting power of social media platforms, Nabi's research investigates how ownership interests shape online news narratives. Both studies acknowledge these factors' influential role in shaping public opinion and discourse. The intricate interplay between social media and print media in news coverage necessitates a multifaceted approach. While this study has provided detailed insights into these dynamics, enriching the understanding requires intertwining the findings with other significant strands of research.

Smith and Brown's (2023) investigation urges consideration of everyday individuals as emerging newsmakers through citizen journalism. Platforms like Twitter and Facebook morph into dynamic spaces where user-generated content shapes the narrative around events, adding a crucial layer to the analysis. Garcia and Lee's (2022) comparative analysis offers a broader perspective on the evolving panorama of news consumption, examining how print media, social media, and online news outlets contribute to the diversity of information and viewpoints available to audiences. Integrating Ferdous's (2023) research underscores the transformative influence of digital platforms on traditional sectors like media and healthcare. Similarly, Patel and Jones' (2024) exploration injects ethical considerations into the equation, shedding light on the challenges of leveraging user-generated content while upholding journalistic integrity.

In conclusion, the evolving landscape of news production and consumption, influenced by social media, demands a comprehensive understanding of its implications, challenges, and ethical considerations, as highlighted by the collective insights of these studies.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, the researcher suggests the following recommendations:

- 1. Enhanced social media integration:** Print media outlets should further enhance their integration of social media content into their reporting practices. This includes utilizing direct quotes, summarizing trends and actively engaging with platform-specific insights to provide readers with a comprehensive view of public discourse. Embracing a variety of social media platforms and monitoring emerging trends can help newspapers stay abreast of evolving news narratives and audience preferences.

2. Investment in digital literacy and ethics:

Given the increasing reliance on social media for news consumption, it is imperative for print media organizations to invest in digital literacy initiatives. Journalists must be equipped with the skills to critically evaluate and verify user-generated content to mitigate the spread of misinformation and uphold journalistic integrity. Additionally, ethical guidelines should be established to govern the responsible utilization of social media content in news reporting, ensuring transparency and accuracy in coverage.

3. Audience engagement strategies:

Print media outlets should prioritize audience engagement strategies to foster meaningful interactions and cultivate reader loyalty. This entails leveraging social media platforms as distribution channels and forums for dialogue and feedback. By actively soliciting reader input and responding to audience concerns, newspapers can strengthen their relationships with their communities and adapt their content offerings to better align with audience interests and preferences.

These recommendations aim to empower print media outlets to navigate the evolving media landscape shaped by social media, ensuring their continued relevance and contribution to fostering a diverse and informed public discourse.

Conclusion

The research delves into the multifaceted effects of social media on the coverage provided by print media. It underscores the undeniable sway of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, which have evolved into primary conduits for news consumption among a significant segment of the populace. Consequently, there has been a noticeable decline in the readership of print media, prompting newspapers and other traditional publications to reassess their approaches. The analysis illustrates how social media has left its mark on news production, distribution, and consumption in several key ways. Firstly, in terms of production, journalists are increasingly integrating social media content into their reporting. This involves incorporating direct quotes, summarizing trends, and leveraging platform-specific insights to enrich their articles and foster engagement in public discourse. Secondly, regarding distribution, social media platforms have become pivotal channels for disseminating news. They enable print media to extend their reach to broader audiences and promote their content effectively. Thirdly, concerning consumption, there has been a noticeable shift towards more fragmented and personalized

news consumption patterns. Readers now rely on a myriad of sources beyond traditional print media. Social media algorithms further customize the news experience, potentially shaping reader preferences and exposing them to various viewpoints.


This research paves the way for further exploration of various avenues. Future inquiries could delve into the long-term ramifications of social media on the sustainability and revenue models of print media. They could also investigate the potential for misinformation and bias inherent in news consumption driven by social media. Ethical considerations surrounding the utilization of social media content in news reporting warrant attention, as do the roles of social media in shaping public opinion and influencing political discourse. Additionally, the emergence of new technologies and their implications for the future of news consumption demand scrutiny. Through continued research and adaptation, print media can uphold its relevance and contribute to fostering a robust and diverse media ecosystem.

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A Study on How Age Sensitivity Moderates the Learning of New Health Behaviors via Social Media Platforms

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to analyze the moderation effect of Age Sensitivity on the relationship between Cognitive Factors and Self-Regulation of social media users in learning new health behaviors via social media platforms in Sub-Sahara Africa. The study adopted a cross-sectional research design where data were collected and analyzed at one point in time. In line with the requirements of cross-sectional design, quantitative research methods were used to collect, analyze and present the findings. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, regressions, modegraphs, and confirmatory analysis in structural equation modelling. Results reveal that the moderation effect of Age Sensitivity is high. Inversely, the moderation effect is low when Age Sensitivity is low. Therefore, high Age Sensitivity will influence Cognitive Factors to create high Self-Regulation of social media users in learning new health behaviors via social media platforms in Sub-Sahara Africa. We learn that individuals with strong beliefs become more self-regulated once they become age-sensitive. Given that Self-Regulation positively influences health behavior, we are confident that the moderation effect of Age Sensitivity in the relationship between Cognitive Factors and Self-Regulation results in positive learning. Therefore, it is important for social media developers to enhance the knowledge of their users. At the same time, they should be mindful of users' beliefs and ages when packaging health-related content. This will promote information acceptance and consumption, thereby helping to change the Health Behaviors of social media users positively. Further, governments and relevant regulatory institutions should prohibit children from accessing adult content via social media. An age limit requirement could be placed on different online content such that individuals below that age are not eligible to access or watch such information.

Introduction

Social media platforms are increasingly becoming prominent in the daily lives of many across the globe. According to Dewing (2012), social media platforms have been used over the past decade to share personal as well as business information over the internet amongst individuals, groups of people, and organizations. Saleh et al. (2012) define social media as electronic platforms that support users in creating and engaging in online communities for the purposes of sharing ideas, experiences, and other information via multiple data formats. Social media users can create targeted content depending on the goal, and this information can be shared publicly or privately. Some social media platforms currently in use include Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, and X, among others. The Digital 2024 global report reveals that 5.04 billion people use social media (Kemp, 2024). According to the United Nations, this is approximately 62% of the number of people leaving on earth, which currently stands at 8.08 billion (UN, 2024). According to Kemp (2024), Uganda has 13.3 million internet users, out of whom 3 million are actively engaged on social media platforms. This is approximately 7% of the country's population. Comparatively, Cameroon, our second country of study, has 12.7 million internet users, and 5 million, representing 17% of the population, are on

social media. On the other hand, Nigeria, our third country of study, has 103 million internet users, of whom 37 million are on social media (Kemp, 2024).

As seen above, millions of people use social media platforms that allow different people to meet and share information freely (Morrison et al. 2008). Hospitals and other healthcare service providers, manufacturers, educationists, and political and spiritual leaders use these platforms to inform, educate, convince, and mobilize support and demand for their products and services. Tailored information services are also available (Moorhead et al. 2014; Martinasek et al. 2011). However, not all information is shared via social media brings about positive behavioral change. For example, as earlier seen, information about contraceptives may lead to moral decay (Purdy, 2011; Levine, 2009). Deliberately attractive information about tobacco products targeting youths and other non-smokers may cause smoking addiction and its accompanying effects, such as cancers (Liang et al., 2015; Wrzosiński, 2022). Alcohol and other spirits advertisements may lead to alcoholism and associated socio-economic implications (McQuiston, 2023; Lozoff, 2023). Online sex networks may lead to prostitution, the spread of sexually transmitted diseases and moral degradation (Rocha et al., 2023; Holme, 2014; Fottrell, 2023; Weiss, 2010). Yet all these are readily and indiscriminately available on

social media. Worse still, the business corporations pay influential people to present these advertisements, effectively acting as role models.

The above scenarios and incidences are likely to cause new Health Behaviors among social media users. Some are immediate, while others will be felt in the long run. The immediate health behavioral changes will be manifested in an increasing number of youths and other groups adopting risky and immoral sexual behavior such as prostitution, masturbation, homosexuality and lesbianism, and cross-generational sex due to increased materialism, among others. This is because attractive information about these sexual acts is readily available via social media. The long-term effect of these acts is a systemic breakdown in morals, religious faiths and beliefs in society, the spread of diseases, the emergence of new sexually transmitted diseases, and population degradation due to single-sex marriages and deaths, among others. This study sought to analyze the moderation effect of Age Sensitivity in the relationship between Cognitive Factors and Self-Regulation of social media users in learning new health behaviors via social media platforms in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Cognitive Factors and Self-Regulation of Social Media Users

Cognitive or personal factors are those attributes unique to an individual that help the learning process. These include beliefs, knowledge, and attitudes. Bayrón (2013) argues that not all that is observed can be learned or imitated. This is because Cognitive Factors come into play during the observation process and can block some obscure messages observed from being learned by the subject. Hence, Cognitive Factors help the subject learn a new behavior, but only selectively.

For example, a Muslim may observe their role model eating pork, but because of his religious beliefs, such a person may not start eating pork. Similarly, an individual having knowledge of the consequences of eating pork as a Muslim will unlikely imitate the act. Hence, there will be no behavioral change. However, if the subject's beliefs are similar to the role model – in this case, he is not Muslim and his religious beliefs permit him to eat pork, such a person will learn the observed act and do it through imitation. This causes behavioral change.

Just like beliefs, Self-Regulation is the inner feeling that compels the subject to learn an observed act or not. Self-Regulation goes hand in hand with ultimate rewards and punishment. If the subject

perceives rewards after imitating the observed act, such a person will actually do the act. On the other hand, if a person perceives the outcome as punishment, they will not do the observed act for fear of punishment. The example of Muslims eating pork can also apply here. A Muslim will not eat pork even if they observe their role model eat it because they fear the consequence of punishment by Allah.

In terms of SM and Health Behavior, whereas a celebrity or even a medical doctor may share information concerning the use of contraceptives for better family planning and prevention of Sexually Transmitted Diseases (STDs), a subject from the catholic religious faith may not learn and actually use contraceptives. This is because the Catholic Church forbids its followers from using such contraceptives.

Blalock et al. (2023) define Self-Regulation as the act of controlling oneself through goal setting, self-instruction, self-rewarding, inner feedback communication and self-evaluation to identify areas where the individual can seek external support from the environment. Bandura (1986) argues that Self-Regulation helps one to learn new behaviors consciously. Self-regulated individuals set their own goals, monitor themselves, seek and maintain social support necessary for achieving their goals, and have contingency plans for countering barriers (Blalock et al., 2023).

According to Winters (2003), Self-Regulation is essential to the learning process. On SM, it helps the learners set their learning goals, eliminate “noise” or unwanted information that circulates around SM, and ensure that they only seek support from the online society to achieve their goals. Individuals can observe their own engagements and know what to do, why and when to stop. By doing this, Blalock et al. (2023) argue that one can set a purpose for his engagement. Through self-reinforcement, an individual feels good about his accomplishments and regrets the bad things they have done. Self-regulated individuals learn to reward themselves for accomplishments and punish themselves for failures or offenses committed against themselves and others.

Age Sensitivity and the Learning of Health Behaviors by Social Media Users

An element lacking in Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory and even in Rotter's Social Learning Theory is the role played by Age Sensitivity in influencing behavioral change. Even in the presence of Cognitive Factors such as beliefs, knowledge, and attitudes, an individual's Self-Regulation will change relative to

Age Sensitivity. Studies by the United Kingdom's National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NIHCE) and the World Health Organization (WHO, 2000) show that Age Sensitivity influences behavioral change. The study carried out in the UK posits that national attempts to change people's Health Behavior did not result in universality. They did not apply across the population because different age groups responded differently to the incentives (NIHCE, 2007). Given the same cognitive attributes, a young person will be quick to change compared to an older person. This also applies in the case of motivation, whereby a given motivational factor may not apply to different age groups. Moreover, age alone per-se may not cause change in the absence of Cognitive Factors.

Furthermore, individuals participating in online communities are quite selective about the age groups of users they interact with. For example, if an individual is older, he/she may prefer to join online communities with a mature age group. Such a person may not learn new Health Behaviors from their age groups. Inversely, young people prefer to join online social media communities where members are relatively young and may desist information from mature people (Cahill & Coffey, 2023). A study by the Australian Communications and Media Authority revealed that young people joined online social network communities of fellow youths, where they engaged in various activities, among which were sexting and bullying. Children of 16 to 17 years reported that they had received or sent sexually provocative images or videos of themselves or others in their communities (ACMA, 2013). The same study shows that adult parents aged 45 and above were keen on monitoring their children's activity on online social networks, although they did not join such communities.

Research design

The study adopted a cross-sectional research design where data were collected and analyzed at one point in time. In line with the requirements of cross-sectional design, quantitative research methods were used to collect, analyze and present the findings.

Sample design

Given that this study involved several countries, the researcher used a convenience sampling technique to select 3 countries that participated in the study. These included Uganda (located in East Africa, which has 9 countries), Cameroon (located in Central Africa, which has 9 countries) and Nigeria (located in West

Africa, which has 16 countries). This was done to ensure a fair distribution of samples across the Sub-Saharan Africa region. Further, these countries were selected because the researcher could access them for data collection using his academic and social networks. According to Dörnyei (2007), convenience sampling is a nonprobability sampling technique used to select elements of the population as long as they meet the cardinal criteria of inclusion. Some reasons for using this method are accessibility, privacy, and willingness to participate in the study.

Given that the study population was unknown, a formula for determining sample sizes using population proportion Hyde (2024) was used with the following assumptions:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Population proportion} &= 0.5 \\ \text{Margin of error} &= 4\% \\ \text{Confidence level} &= 95\% (z=1.96) \end{aligned}$$

Determining the sample for each country

$$n=p(1-p) (z/E)^2$$

Where;

p = population proportion / percentage picking a choice of 50% (0.5)

z = standard normal deviation set at 95% confidence level (1.96)

E = Estimate / Margin of error $\pm 4\%$

$$n=0.5(1-0.5) (1.96/0.04)^2$$

$$n=0.25(49)^2$$

$$n=12.25^2$$

$$n=150.0625$$

$$n=151$$

Hence total sample for all three countries = $152 \times 3 = 453$

A total of 151 survey respondents comprising ordinary social media users were selected using simple random sampling from each participating country. This gave a total survey sample of 453, as seen in the computation above. This sample is consistent with Roscoe's (1975) rule of thumb that a sample between 30 and 500 is sufficient for surveys. The sample also meets the 100 required minimum samples for conducting factors analysis and the threshold of 200 respondents for structural equation modelling. A simple random technique was used to select 151 respondents from each country. It was praised for being unbiased as it gave each element of the population the same chance of being selected to participate in the study. Table 1

shows the survey sample.

Table 1:

The survey sample

Country	Sample category	Sampling technique	Sample size
Uganda	Social media users	Simple random	151
Nigeria	Social media users	Simple random	151
Cameroon	Social media users	Simple random	151
Total			453

Data Collection and Analysis Methods

Data were collected using online questionnaires developed on Google Forms. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression methods. A Modgraph by Jose was used to show moderation effects.

Moderator Variable

A moderator variable influences the relationship between the independent and dependent variables by changing the impact of intervening variables. It affects the strength of a relationship between two variables (Statistics Solutions, 2016). In this study, the moderator variable is Age Sensitivity.

Table 2:

Gender

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Female	165	46.0	46.0
	Male	193	53.9	100.0
Total		358	100.0	

Results in Table 2 show that the majority of the respondents were male (Freq=193, 54%). Female respondents were 165, representing 46%.

Table 3:

Age group

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	20-29 years	123	34.3	34.3
	30-39 years	138	38.5	72.8
	40-49 years	66	18.4	91.2
	50 years and above	31	8.65	100.0
Total		358	100.0	

Results in Table 3 reveal that most respondents were in the age group 30 to 39 years (Freq=138, representing

Research Hypothesis

The research hypothesis was “Age Sensitivity positively moderates the relationship between Cognitive Factors and Self-Regulation of social media users in learning new health behaviors via social media platforms in Sub-Saharan Africa”.

Results

Sociodemographic data

3.1 Respondents Gender

Descriptive statistics were used to analyze respondents' gender, as seen in Table 2.

Respondents' Age

Further, descriptive statistics were used to examine the age groups of respondents. Table 3 presents the results.

38.5%). This was followed by the age group 20 to 29 years with 123 respondents, representing 34%.

The third age group was 40 to 49 years, with 66 respondents representing 18%. The least age group represented was 50 years and above, with only 31 respondents, representing 8.7%.

Respondents' Level of Education

Descriptive statistics were also used to analyze the respondents' levels of education. Table 4 presents the results.

Table 4: Level of education

Table 4:

Level of education

		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Certificate	11	3.07	3.07
	Diploma	68	18.9	21.9
	Degree	176	49.1	71.1
	Masters	96	26.8	98.0
	PhD	7	1.95	100.0
Total		358	100.0	

Results in Table 4 indicate that the majority of the respondents were degree holders (Freq=176, 49%). This was followed by master's degree holders (Freq=96, 27%) and diploma holders (Freq=68, 19%). The least respondents were certificate holders (Freq=11, 3%) and PhD holders (Freq=7, 2%).

Testing for Moderation

Multiple Hierarchical Regression analysis was used to examine the moderating effect of Age Sensitivity on the relationship between Cognitive Factors and Self-Regulation. Table 5 presents the results.

Table 5:

Age Sensitivity Moderating Cognitive Factors and Self-Regulation

Model	Model 1		Model 2		
Variable	B	Beta	B	Beta	n
(Constant)	2.489**		4.484**		
Cognitive Factors	0.134*	0.124*	-0.324	-0.299	358
Age Sensitivity	0.26**	0.388**	-0.277	-0.414	
Cognitive Factors * Age Sensitivity		0.388**	0.122*	1.021*	
R		.443		.454	
R2		.196		.206	
Adj R2		.192		.199	
R2 Change		.196		.010	
F Change		43.303		4.468	
Sig. F		.000		.035	
F		43.303		30.640	
Sig.		.000		.000	

**.*Significant at 0.01*

*. *Significant at 0.05*

Results in Table 5, model 1 reveal that the relationship between Cognitive Factors and Self-Regulation is significant at a 95% confidence level (Beta=0.124*, P<0.5). Further, the relationship between Age Sensitivity and Self-Regulation is significant at a 99% confidence level (Beta=0.388**). The predicting power of Cognitive Factors and Age Sensitivity on

Self-Regulation is 19% (Adj R2= .192).

In model 2, Cognitive Factors, Age Sensitivity together with the product of Cognitive Factors and Age Sensitivity contribute 19.9% of Self-Regulation (Adj R2=.199). The product of Cognitive Factors and Age Sensitivity contributes to 1% of Self-Regulation (R2 Change=.010). This means that Age Sensitivity

moderates the relationship between Cognitive Factors and Self-Regulation. For moderation to manifest, all the above relationships should be present and significant. However, the moderation effect, though significant, is very small, given that the product of Cognitive Factors and Age Sensitivity contributed only 1% of Self-Regulation.

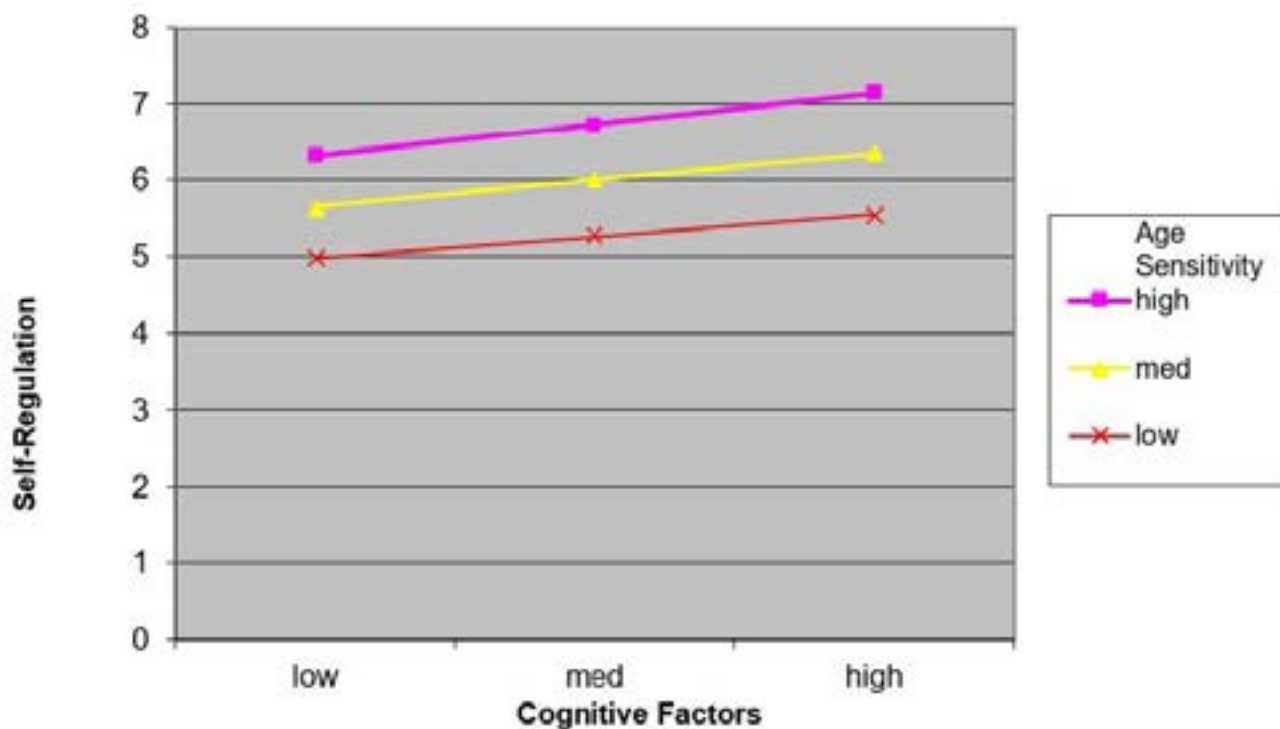
Testing for Moderation Effect Using a Modgraph

To further examine the moderating effect of Age Sensitivity on the relationship between Cognitive Factors and Self-Regulation, Jose’s (2013) Modgraph was used. Results are presented in Table 6 and Figure 1

Table 6:
Coordinates for Age Sensitivity

3 x 3 Table Continuous			
	Low	Med	High
Age Sensitivity			
High	6.31266	6.73045	7.14825
Med	5.64733	5.99747	6.34762
Low	4.98199	5.26449	5.54699

Figure 1:
Moderation effect of Age Sensitivity



Since low, medium and high coordinates of Age Sensitivity do not intersect, the resultant lines representing the Age Sensitivity moderation effect are parallel, although they are moving towards the intersection. This indicates that Age Sensitivity moderates the relationship between Cognitive Factors and Self-Regulation, as shown in Figure 1. A further examination of Figure 1 reveals that the moderation effect is high when Age Sensitivity is high. Inversely, the moderation effect is low when Age Sensitivity is low. Therefore, high Age Sensitivity will influence

Cognitive Factors to create high Self-Regulation.

Confirmatory Analysis

Confirmatory analysis was conducted using the structural equation modelling technique to confirm the findings from regression and Modgraph. Table 7 presents the results.

Table 7:*Age Sensitivity Moderating Cognitive Factors and Self-Regulation - Model Fit Summary*

X2	D	P	X2/D	GF	AGF	NFI	RF	IFI	TLI	CF	RMSEA
	F		F	I	I		I			I	
8.65	6	.19	1.442	.99	.968	.983	.94	.995	.981	.99	.035
3		4		3			0			4	

	Estimate	S.E.	C.R.	Beta	P	Hypothesis	
Self-Regulation	8.65	Cognitive Factors	.185	.055	3.332	.151 ***	Hypothesis
Self-Regulation	3	Age Sensitivity	.360	.035	10.174	.473 ***	is supported
Self-Regulation		Age Sensitivity * Cognitive Factors	.105	.030	3.561	.157 ***	

Confirmatory results in Table 7 reveal a significant positive relationship between the moderator variable Age Sensitivity and Self-Regulation (Beta=.473, $P < 0.001$). At the same time, there was a significant positive relationship between the interaction variable Age Sensitivity * Cognitive Factors and the dependent variable Self-Regulation (Beta=.157, $P < 0.001$). Given that the independent variable, Cognitive Factors, had a positive significant relationship with its dependent variable Self-Regulation (Beta=.151, $P < 0.001$), it was suggested that Age Sensitivity positively moderates the relationship between Cognitive Factors and Self-Regulation. This implies that Age Sensitivity enhances the relationship between Cognitive Factors and Self-Regulation. Looking at the Modgraph in Figure 1, we observe that the effect of Cognitive Factors on Self-Regulation is more at higher levels of Age Sensitivity. In other words, the more age-sensitive the social media users are, the more their cognitive attributes, such as knowledge and skills, will increase their level of Self-Regulation. Conversely, the less age-sensitive the social media users are, the less their cognitive attributes will increase their level of Self-Regulation. It is, however, worth noting that the moderation effect of Age Sensitivity on the relationship between Cognitive Factors and Self-Regulation is weak owing to slight differences in the slopes at the different levels of Age Sensitivity.

Based on the above findings, the research hypothesis was supported. Therefore, Age Sensitivity positively moderates the relationship between Cognitive Factors and Self-Regulation of social media users in learning new health behaviors via social media platforms in Sub-Saharan Africa.

Discussion

Correlation and regression findings supported the research hypothesis that Age Sensitivity moderates the relationship between Cognitive Factors and Self-Regulation. Further, SEM results revealed that the moderation effect of Age Sensitivity in the relationship between Cognitive Factors and Self-Regulation of social media users in learning new health behaviors via social media platforms was positive and significant. This finding suggests that where Age Sensitivity is high, the relationship between Cognitive Factors and Self-Regulation is also high. The current finding confirms suggestions by literature that Age Sensitivity moderates an individual's knowledge and beliefs, thereby making them more self-regulated in terms of controlling one's actions and setting one's learning goals, among others (NIHCE, 2007; WHO, 2000). The findings help to validate a study by Warwas et al. (2021), which established that young people were heavy users compared to older people. According to Warwas et al. (2021), younger people used social media 7 times more than the elders. This is further reinforced by Xu (2022), who argues that young people and women are widespread social media users. These groups used social media by posting their status more than the male adults, which significantly influenced them to learn new behaviors from users with similar preferences.

We learn from this finding that social media users who are highly knowledgeable and possess strong beliefs in their cultural norms and religion, coupled with their beliefs towards certain age groups, are more reserved in terms of sharing and consuming health-related information via social media platforms (Xu, 2022). The higher one's Age Sensitivity towards social media participants, the more their knowledge and personal beliefs will influence that person to

become more self-regulated.

This finding can facilitate the learning process in the sense that individuals with solid beliefs and who base their learning on age groups where information emanates from are likely to employ selective learning. This helps them to consume only desired information which will benefit their health and positively change their Health Behaviors. For example, an older person who is highly knowledgeable and with strong religious beliefs while searching for information about sexual pleasure may avoid visiting pornographic pages and or communities in favor of a religious or scientific page or online community for learning. This enables them to learn without distortion.

Conclusion

The study sought to analyze the moderation effect of Age Sensitivity on the relationship between Cognitive Factors and Self-Regulation of social media users in learning new health behaviors via social media platforms in Sub-Sahara Africa. Findings revealed a positive and significant moderation effect of Age Sensitivity in the relationship between Cognitive Factors and Self-Regulation of social media users in learning new health behaviors via social media platforms. Therefore, we conclude that the interaction of Age Sensitivity helped to improve the relationship between Cognitive Factors and Self-Regulation of social media users in learning new health behaviors via social media platforms in Sub-Sahara Africa.

Recommendations

For the case of Age Sensitivity positively moderating Cognitive Factors and Self-Regulation, we learn that individuals who are knowledgeable with strong beliefs, once they become age-sensitive, they also become more self-regulated. Given that Self-Regulation has a positive influence on Health Behavior, we are confident that the moderation effect of Age Sensitivity in the relationship between Cognitive Factors and Self-Regulation results in positive learning. Therefore, it is important for social media developers to enhance the knowledge of their users, and at the same time, they should be mindful of users' beliefs and ages when packaging health-related content. This will promote information acceptance and consumption, thereby helping to positively change the Health Behaviors of social media users. Further, governments and relevant regulatory institutions should prohibit children from accessing adult content via social media. An age limit requirement could be placed on different online

content such that individuals below that age are not eligible to access or watch such information. For example, online channels that teach people how to satisfy their partners sexually should not be accessible to children below the legal age of consent in the respective countries. This can be enforced through national Information Communication Technology regulatory institutions.

Limitations of the Study

We note a weak regression of $R=0.443$ and 0.454 for Cognitive Factors and Age Sensitivity on Self-Regulation. The total variance of 45.4% means that other unknown factors explain 54.6% of changes in Self-Regulation. Future research should be directed towards establishing these other factors and how they influence Self-Regulation of social media users.


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The Role of Eurosceptic Tabloids in Building Awareness of the British People Ahead of the Referendum on UK Membership in the European Union in 2016

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ABSTRACT

The research aimed to explain the role of the leading British tabloids in the 2016 referendum campaign and to show that tabloid populism practised by selected press titles, using several methods and tools, skilfully influenced the formation of public opinion. The study, which was essentially based on content analysis, examined the three most opinion-forming tabloid daily newspapers: “The Sun”, “The Daily Express”, and “The Daily Mail”, which, according to the observers, were and remain populist newspapers. The article is only a contribution to undertaking broader research, the subject of which should be the instrumental role of the British press in shaping attitudes and social opinions hostile to the European Union during Great Britain’s membership in this organization.

Introduction

The aim of the article is to examine how the populism characteristic of leading British tabloids shaped public opinion during the 2016 referendum on Great Britain’s membership in the European Union (EU) and how selected tabloids influenced British voters to legitimize Brexit. The article addresses only a fragment of a broader problem, namely the instrumental role of British tabloids not only in the case of the EU referendum in 2016 but in the long-term impact on the British, aimed at developing a negative attitude towards the EU and British membership in this organization.

The basic hypothesis adopted at the beginning of the research is the conclusion that selected press titles convinced the majority of their readers to leave the EU by using a populist mechanism to antagonize selected social groups and, in this case, by contrasting the allegedly corrupt European and national elites with „ordinary, honest and hard-working people”, inciting fear of the influx of immigrants and appealing to national resentments. An important part of populist rhetoric was exaggerating threats to the British nation and its sovereignty from the EU and shaping the belief that only the will of the “people”, and the determination of “ordinary Britons” can eliminate them.

The research was carried out based on the content analysis method (Pisarek, 1983; Michalczyk, 2009; Klepka, 2016) of three British press titles: “The Sun”, “The Daily Mail” and “The Daily Express”, which, being the most read tabloids on the market, strongly supported the country’s exit from the European Union and - in line with observers’ opinions - were and remain populist newspapers (Moore & Ramsay, 2017). The study covered the period between April 15

and June 23, 2016, designated as the official duration of the referendum campaign.

The content of the mentioned tabloids was analyzed based on selected keywords, which - as available literature shows - most accurately characterize the phenomenon of populism. These include “establishment”, used interchangeably with “elite”, which should be combined with related words: “people”, “ordinary people”, “ordinary Britons”, sometimes “nation”, and the term “foreign”, but in this case closely related to words almost identical to Brexit supporters: “immigrant”, “immigration”, “crime/law”, “order”, “burden on public services”, selected immigrant nations: Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Albania, Turkey (Moore & Ramsay, 2017, p. 5).

To examine the socio-political context of the activity of the populist tabloid press at a theoretical level, a query was used - in relation to scientific publications and documents, reports, analyses and legal acts. The research used existing and very extensive statistical analyses relating to the activity of the British media in the 2016 referendum campaign (Moore & Ramsay, 2017; Levy et al., 2017; Simpson & Startin, 2022).

The essence of populism

In the political science literature, it is accepted that populist movements emerged simultaneously in Russia and the United States in the late 19th century and had a close connection with agrarianism in the sense that they were necessarily a revolt of a reactionary, economically backward class of peasants in rapidly modernizing societies (Müller, 2016, p. 18). The term „populism” appeared in scientific studies on the theory of modernization already in the

1950s, and in the 1960s, it was present in debates on decolonization and the future of the peasant class. It returned in the early 21st century in discussions about the origins of communism in general and Maoism in particular. In its early days, populism was described as “a helpless articulation of the anxieties and anger of those who long for a simpler, “pre-modern” life” (Müller, 2016, p. 17). J-W. Müller (2016, p. 11) notes that currently, especially in Europe, around the word populism, „all kinds of anxieties and - much less often - hopes are crystallizing”.

Populism is difficult to define precisely; hence, it is most often described through the prism of its manifestations and characteristic features. This is because, unlike other “compact” ideologies, it is axiologically unclear and does not have a “rigid canon of values” (Marczewska-Rytko, 2011, p. 25). It is often “borrowed” by other ideologies.

In the literature on the subject, populism is presented in at least five dimensions: ideology, discourse, political communication style, political logic, political or electoral strategy, and organization (Lipiński & Stępińska, 2020, p. 11). According to J. Szacki (2006, pp. 15-18), there are three approaches to populism: demophilia, i.e., idealization of the people, demagoguery and negation (rejection) of the institutional framework of operation of a given system. Populism is approached in a similar way by the English political scientist Paul A. Taggart, who highlights the negation of the politics of representation and identification with an idealized people (community). He calls populism an ideology, but one without any value. Populists avoid permanent involvement in political life; they become involved only in situations of political crisis, serious reforms, or social structural changes (Marczewska-Rytko, 2011, p. 24).

There is an increasingly clear view among experts that populism is a “gradable property of communication acts”, a type of discourse strategy, style, or communication mechanism used by specific entities (Lipiński, Stępińska, 2020, p. 7). The analysis of the literature allows us to identify three basic elements of populism:

- the people (sometimes referred to as the nation or “common people”),
- morally motivated fight,
- elites.

It can be said that in the populist approach, the people are fighting in the name of moral, noble goals against corrupt, degenerated elites. In other words, the people morally confront the elites (Mansbridge & Macedo, 2019, p. 60). Populism, according to J-W. Müller (2016, p. 19), is “a particular moralistic

imaginary of politics, a way of viewing the political world that pits morally pure and fully united - but ultimately fictitious - people against elites who are considered corrupt or otherwise morally inferior”. It is also defined as a specific type of discourse in which one side claims to express the popular interests and represent the will of the people against the “establishment” or elite, perceived as an obstacle to the development and satisfaction of the people (Stavrakakis, 2017, p. 527).

All populist movements claim to represent “the people”. Ordinary people are seen as morally good or oppressed, and elites are seen as corrupt or evil in some ways. The relationship between the people and the elites is antagonistic - there is no room for compromise. An inherent feature of populist discourses is appealing to the will of the people. It is epitomized by the statement made by Nigel Farage, the leading herald of Brexit, who, commenting on the first results of the referendum, considered them “a victory for real people, a victory for ordinary people, a victory for decent people” (The Independent, June 24, 2016).

The above-mentioned elements of populism suggest its other features, namely the uniformity or homogeneity of the people (nation), its exclusivity, greater direct power of the people and nationalism (Müller, 2016, p. 21). Populists often emphasize the strong ideological coherence of the people. The danger of such a procedure is that the suggested homogeneity leaves no room in the public debate for disputes, diversity of interests, and the need for negotiation and compromise. This is unacceptable in a democratic country. The view of the unity of the people corresponds to the claim that the people represented by a populist movement or party are the only legitimate actors in a democracy. So, as Müller (2016, p. 21) notes, “this is the essence of populism: only some people are truly a people”.

The thesis about the moral superiority of ordinary people is not so much a suggestion but a strong belief that people should rule more directly. Populists demand direct elections where they are indirect and advocate greater participatory democracy. A large role is given to referenda or other voting methods by which citizens can bypass perceived (sometimes real) distortions of the popular will through complex legislative and administrative processes. Populists sometimes demand - contrary to constitutional provisions - the simplification of democratic “complexities” for the benefit of ordinary people. Such demands undermine the structures of liberal democracy. Finally, populism, although not directly

does not appear on banners), is related to nationalism associated with political communities based on ethnicity or race. In practice, the word “people” in existing populist movements means the people of one nation or limited political community: a distinct historical and geographical entity (Mansbridge & Macedo, 2019, p. 64).

All the above-described elements and features are sometimes accompanied by other correlates related to populism, namely:

- the will of the people embodied in a charismatic leader,
- opposition and even hostility towards foreign groups,
- attributing special value to authentic folk knowledge (people know best) while negating dialogue, compromise and scientific knowledge (Mansbridge & Macedo, 2019, p. 65).

In some versions of populism, an individual - often charismatic - presents himself/herself (or is presented) as representing the people in a unique way that divided elected representatives cannot. According to populists, there is no threat to democracy if people temporarily gather around an individual. Many populist leaders, in order to meet popular expectations, try to emphasize that they are „just like us”. However, some clearly do not fit this description.

Populists generally maintain that the people are in an antagonistic relationship not only with the elite but also with one or more social groups presented as parasitic and harmful to a “healthy society” (e.g. Black people, Jews, immigrants, Muslims, etc.). We are dealing here with variants of populism such as “ethnopolitism” (Laclau, 2005, p. 196) or “nativism” (Mudde, 2007, p. 19). Antagonism towards foreign and politically weak groups is a common, perhaps immutable, feature of right-wing populism (Mansbridge & Macedo, 2019, p. 66).

Populists articulate a belief in the innate wisdom of the people, accompanied by passion, strong will and direct action, as well as an aversion to deliberation, complicated procedures or compromises. They also appeal to some psychological characteristics of authoritarianism, including impatience with constitutional trappings that make it difficult to act for a clear good against a clear evil directly. Venezuela’s populist leader Hugo Chávez described this characteristic of the people as follows: “all individuals are subject to error and seduction, but not the people, which possesses to an eminent degree of consciousness of its own good and the measure of its independence. Because of this, its judgment is

pure, its will is strong, and none can corrupt it or even threaten it” (Mansbridge & Macedo, 2019, p. 66).

Concluding his considerations on populism, Müller (2016, pp. 70-71) formulated seven theses characterizing this phenomenon. He emphasized that populism is not a part of modern democracy, but neither is it a type of pathology represented by irrational citizens. This is the permanent shadow of representative politics, its negative by-product. There will always be someone who will speak on behalf of „real people” and challenge the elites in power. However, not everyone who criticizes the elites is a populist. Populists are not only anti-elitist but also anti-pluralistic because they claim that they have a monopoly on representing the people. Populists should be criticized for being a real threat to democracy. However, this does not mean that they should not be involved in a political debate. A conversation with populists is not the same as a populist conversation. The issues they raise need to be taken seriously without condoning the way they are presented. Populism should force defenders of liberal democracy to think about the reasons for the failures of the system of representation and encourage deeper reflection on general moral issues.

The phenomenon of tabloid populism

Tabloid journalism is a type of popular, largely sensational journalism; its name comes from the format of a small newspaper, usually half the size of traditional newspapers. It should be emphasized that not every newspaper printed in a tabloid format is a tabloid in terms of content and style. In the early 21st century, several traditional, influential British newspapers, such as “The Independent”, “The Times” and “The Scotsman”, moved to a smaller format, calling it a “compact” format.

In its essence, tabloid journalism refers to a form and style of journalism that is the opposite of opinion-forming, high-quality journalism (Bastos, 2019, p. 1). However, some scientists question the division between tabloid and broadsheet, arguing that both types of journalism approach similar content. Since the second half of the 20th century, changes have been observed in the news production system, which has moved away from focusing on political and socio-economic issues towards information and entertainment news, covering the personal lives of celebrities and show business events (Bastos, 2019, pp. 2-3).

David Rowe (2000, p. 81), having analyzed a representative sample of literature relating to tabloids and tabloidization, selected ten features of tabloids,

noting, at the same time, that this is an incomplete set:

- disappearance of content relating to orthodox, official policy,
- presenting (often as a result of intrusive voyeurism) private matters in the public domain,
- sensationalism and spectacular nature of the news, combined with the ephemerality of both media celebrities and the news itself,
- blurring the boundaries between news and entertainment (“infotainment”) and news and advertising (“advertorial”),
- the growing obsession with and fetishization of celebrity and popularity,
- uncontrolled expansion of media and media products and applications,
- focus on quickly accessible and digestible information, often combined with its personalized nature,
- the decline of media ethics and the “serious” role of the press as the fourth power, combined with moralizing hypocrisy replacing moral seriousness,
- the drift towards right-wing, owner-sponsored, authoritarian populism and the failure of the political left to lose its monopoly on involvement in the life affairs of “the people”,
- “rough” cultural climate and blunting of individual sensitivity.

It should be noted that the presented catalogue of features refers not only to the press itself but more broadly to the tabloidization of social life.

The role of the tabloid press has been the subject of particular scientific interest in recent decades, and some researchers refer to tabloid populism as a specific discourse with a high ideological charge, as well as a communication genre that differs from the qualitative press and clearly participates in the dissemination of populist views and opinions (Zappettini, 2020, p. 5). It is believed that due to its nature, the media has always been an essential factor in the spread of populism in mass societies (Herrmann et al., 2021, p. 524). Their role is compared to a “helper” or an “inhaler” of populist discussions because they provide them with the “oxygen of publicity”, regardless of whether their tone is positive or negative. Media populism can be defined as the dissemination of populist ideas and styles by the media (Wettstein et al., 2018, p. 478). This dissemination may take place indirectly (reluctantly, under some informational pressure) or directly (intentionally).

It should be noted that tabloid journalism is a separate genre compared to the so-called “quality

press” or “serious” press (Filar, 2007-2008, p. 490), characterized by certain specific features. Firstly, tabloids differ in their understanding of their own social role. They aim to oppose the „excesses of political correctness and liberal intellectualism”; they are not interested in supporting substantive civic debate (Krämer, 2014, p. 44). Secondly, the tabloids focus on the so-called “soft” content and opinions, not substantive and verified facts. They tend to focus on people, not problems, and try to present the latter in a simplified and catchy way. Thirdly, their emotional, sensational and everyday language resonates with the communication style increasingly adopted by politicians. Characterized by headlines, this language relies on wordplay, rhyme, and alliteration, designed as forms of entertainment, humour, and satire to suit the culture of the target readers. Various studies have paid attention to colloquial, emotional and evaluative vocabulary (Zappettini, 2021, p. 648).

Sensational language is intended to maximize the information value of a given message, but it is also intended to arouse a sense of threat in the recipient. As M. Filar (2007-2008, p. 490) aptly put it, „a scared person is particularly susceptible to psycho- and socio-manipulation. A person who is scared afterwards should be given a simple diagnosis of the causes of the threat, God forbid, without hamleting and intellectualizing on this occasion. Many people prefer simple and obvious things. However, the simpler the diagnosis, the simpler the therapy. People like easy therapies constructed because of simple, common rules of causality”.

On the one hand, tabloids actively enter the populist discourse, matching the communication style typical of populist leaders. On the other hand, if they are not clearly linked to populist movements, they provide them with contact with the people (ordinary people), becoming, as it were, their spokesmen (Mazzoleni, 2008, p. 50).

These interconnected dimensions have contributed to the tabloid press becoming an outstanding media actor in the new “popular politics”, both cultivating populist tendencies in the media institutions themselves and representing a specific journalistic style through which world phenomena are popularized. The tabloid press has also historically fuelled fierce debates about nation and race, typically promoting a nationalist, in some cases chauvinistic, and outright xenophobic agenda, encouraging readers to feel part of a group rather than an antagonistic another group if feelings are mobilized in this way.

Characteristics of the Eurosceptic British tabloid press

The British press market can be broadly divided into two parts: high-quality, opinion-forming press, often referred to as “broadsheets” (e.g. “The Guardian” and “The Times”), and tabloids, which are characterized by sensationalism and attract eye-catching article titles (Foos & Bischof, 2022, p. 23). It should be emphasized that tabloids are also opinion-forming - they shape the world-view of their readers, but they do not categorize themselves as opinion-forming press.

Britain, perhaps more than most Western countries, has a politically engaged and even partisan press. The content goes beyond traditional, even controversial opinions and “normal” promotion of the newspaper’s editorial line. Over the last few decades, political opinions have increasingly replaced facts and commentary, and, on some issues, many British newspapers do not even pretend to be objective. The role of tabloids in Great Britain cannot be overestimated. Today’s press barons are generally right-wing businesspersons, with Rupert Murdoch being the most famous and powerful one. They use their press to propagate their political views, marked by nostalgia for the British Empire. There is probably no other country that has a press culture dominated by tabloids to such an extent as Great Britain. The average Briton reads more newspapers than any other country’s citizen, with the five main tabloid titles reaching around 85% of all readers (Hinde, 2017, p. 81).

The most aggressive, politically engaged part of the British press is the right-wing press, which combines respect for free market economics with ultra-conservative nostalgia (partly imaginary) for Britain in the 1940s and 1950s. Most British newspapers owe their existence to a small group

of “press barons” - businesspersons such as Lords Beaverbrook (the first Max Aitken), Northcliffe (the first - Alfred Harmsworth), and Rothermere (the first - Harold Sidney Harmsworth), who founded newspapers for profit and political influence and required them to broadcast their conservative social and political views. Today’s press barons are generally right-wing businesspersons, with Rupert Murdoch being the most famous and powerful. They use their press to propagate their political views, marked by nostalgia for the British Empire (Hinde, 2017, p. 81). For this group of owners and their publishers, the European Union represents many “hideous” things: regulation, taxes, welfare, collectivism, and the constant reminder that Britain is just one country among many (unlike the Empire they ruled).

The right-wing press, during not only the referendum but also almost three years after it, used the language of civil war towards the opponents of Brexit. The insults carried the threat that opponents would be treated as internal enemies. The same press articulated the promise and hope that Brexit would make Britain great again. In the few years after the referendum, as Nick Cohen noted in “The Guardian”, Brexit hopes had evaporated and only threats remained.

Tabloids have historically played a key role in informing millions of Britons about and giving meaning to the world around them and their internal social and political life. Importantly, over time, the popular press became increasingly involved in political programs, exerted a stronger influence, and divided public opinion. Available post-Brexit research indicates that the tabloid press was able to shape public opinion in the long run, with potentially important political consequences (Foos & Bischof, 2022, p. 19). The readership of the most important British tabloids in 2016 is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1:

Circulation of selected tabloids and their position on Great Britain’s EU membership

Newspaper	Circulation (2016)	Brexit or Remain
The Sun	1,787,096	Brexit
The Daily Mail	1,589,471	Brexit
The Daily Mirror	809,147	Remain
The Daily Star	470,369	Neutral
The Daily Express	408,700	Brexit

Source: Audit Bureau of Circulations. (2016). As cited in Simpson, K., & Startin, N. (2022). Tabloid tales: How the British tabloid press shaped the Brexit vote. *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 61(2), 281–576. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcms.13386> (p. 310).

The comparison shows that the three analyzed tabloids: “The Sun”, “The Daily Mail”, and “The Daily Express”, which supported Brexit with a total number of 3.785.267 readers, clearly outperformed “The Daily Mirror”, which opted to remain in the EU with 809.147 readers. The “force ratio” was 4.7:1. Such proportions are not surprising for British press analysts. They show that in Great Britain, support for Brexit was much greater among readers of the tabloid press.

The British press has historically played a key role in constructing public perceptions of the relationship between the UK and the European Union. Since the creation of the EU, most British newspapers have openly taken a strong political stance: for or against membership in the organization. It can be assumed - although with some reservations - that while most of the titles of the quality and opinion-forming press presented relations between Great Britain and the EU from a Euro positive or slightly Eurosceptic position, the majority of „red” tabloids (red tops - the name adopted in connection with the red logo of the titles), as well as some influential newspapers such as „The Times” and „The Daily Telegraph”, tended to support either Eurosceptic or even Europhobic views (Hinde, [2017](#), p. 82).

The Sun

“The Sun”, whose predecessor was the trade union newspaper “The Daily Herald”, is a good resource for examining how a politically radical, left-wing newspaper was transformed into a magazine that combined conservative values with the style and content of tabloids. “The Sun” was bought by Ruppert Murdoch in 1969 and turned into a tabloid to directly compete with “The Daily Mirror”, the newspaper that dominated the British tabloid market in the 1960s and 1970s. By the late 1970s, “The Sun” had overtaken “The Daily Mirror” in circulation, and by 1992, it had a daily circulation of around 3.6 million.

“The Sun” began to play a special role in anti-European campaigns. In the mid-1990s, it took a strongly negative stance towards the EU. Between 1996 and 2016, nearly 92% of its editorials had a negative tone towards European integration, and 80% were classified as Eurosceptic (Simpson & Startin, [2022](#), p. 5). They portrayed the UK and the EU as adversaries, using metaphors of war. In the 1980s, „The Sun” encouraged readers to submit „anti-French jokes”, and in 1990, it published the infamous headline „Up yours Delors”, denigrating the then president of the European Commission for his supposedly French-centric vision of Europe.

Mainstream tabloid discourse portrayed Britain as a victim of the Franco-German alliance or the Brussels “conspiracy” (Zappettini, [2021](#), p. 650).

In 2016, its print circulation reached 1.787.096 copies, which placed it in first place among British tabloids. The newspaper has had a reputation for being Eurosceptic for over 30 years, and there are various explanations for why its specific stance towards the European Union has sometimes turned Europhobic.

The Daily Mail

„The Daily Mail” is a forerunner in the British tabloid market. Alfred Harmsworth founded the newspaper in 1896 as a right-wing and populist magazine in the format of the American tabloid press (12x16 inches), and soon other titles followed suit, such as „The Daily Express”, which was launched in 1900 and then in the 1930s, Labour-supporting titles such as „The Daily Herald” and „The Daily Mirror” (Zappettini, [2021](#), p. 648).

The print circulation of “The Daily Mail” in 2016 was almost 1.6 million copies, but in 2020, after the “referendum dust settled”, it dropped to 1.3 million, while its digital reach covered 25 million readers (Simpson & Startin, [2022](#), p. 4). The newspaper has had a reputation for being deeply conservative for decades. The infamous stance of its owner, Lord Rothermere Harold Harmsworth, towards German fascism, of which he was a sympathizer and an advocate of closer ties between Great Britain and Nazi Germany, became part of history. The newspaper’s 1934 article “Hurrah for the Black Shirts” led to the newspaper being considered extremely nationalistic from then on (Simpson & Startin, [2022](#), p. 4).

“The Daily Mail” did support the campaign to remain in the European Economic Community (EEC) in the 1975 referendum, but the appointment of Paul Dacre as editor-in-chief in 1992 brought about a groundbreaking change in the paper’s political stance and attitude towards the EU: moved to at least Eurosceptic positions. After a few years, its editorial line was characterized as a belief in Franco-German conspiracies and threats to the sovereignty and security of Great Britain from the European Union (Anderson & Weymouth, [1999](#), p. 18).

In 2011, the newspaper claimed that Germany was turning Europe into a “Fourth Reich” (Harding, [2017](#), p. 11). Following the EU referendum and resigning from the newspaper in 2018, Paul Dacre warned against a change in the newspaper’s approach to the EU, stating that support for Brexit “is in the DNA of both the “Daily Mail” and its readers” (Simpson & Startin, [2022](#), p. 4).

The Daily Express

“The Daily Express” was founded by Arthur Pearson in 1900 as an opinion newspaper, and in 1916 it was sold to William Maxwell Aitken, Lord Beaverbrook, who in the 1940s turned it into the newspaper with the largest circulation in the world. In 2000, the controversial Richard Desmond, previously the owner of many pornographic titles, became the owner of the newspaper.

Similarly to “The Daily Mail”, the circulation of “The Daily Express”, which during the referendum campaign was 400,000 copies, in 2020 it dropped to 300,000 copies. However, the newspaper’s influence on British Eurosceptics is much greater than its circulation might suggest. In 2010, “The Daily Express” launched a crusade called “Get Britain out of Europe”, emphasizing that it is the first newspaper to openly call for the country to leave the European Union: “From this day on, our energies will be directed towards supporting the cause of those who believe that Britain will be better off outside the EU” (The Daily Express, November 25, [2010](#)).

In 2011, the newspaper initiated the collection of votes for a petition to Parliament to hold a referendum on Britain’s continued membership of the EU, which was signed by 373,000 people. Thanks to these and other actions of the newspaper, the issue of EU membership entered broad public discourse, and the position of “The Daily Express” became unambiguously Eurosceptic.

Table 2:

Number of articles in the analyzed tabloids relating to immigration

Newspaper	Number of articles referring to immigration
The Daily Express	568
The Daily Mail	416
The Sun	337

Source: Own study based on Moore, M., & Ramsay, G. (2017). *UK media coverage of the 2016 EU referendum campaign*. Centre for the Study of Media, Communication and Power (p. 71).

which means that the three surveyed newspapers had a 30% share in this number. Moreover, an analysis of 15 national press titles during the 90 days of the campaign showed that the issue of immigration was signalled 99 times on the front pages, 55% of which was in the three tabloids examined: “The Daily Express” - 21, “The Daily Mail” - 20, “The Sun” - 13 (Moore & Ramsey, [2016](#), p. 65).

The populism of leading anti-EU tabloids regarding immigrants was based on two main arguments. Firstly, immigration is enabled by

Analysis. Position of selected British tabloids on UK membership in the European Union in the 2016 referendum campaign

The content analysis of articles by three anti-EU tabloids during the referendum campaign allows us to select two main threads of populist discourse:

- immigration as a threat to the interests of ordinary Britons;
- EU membership as a clash of antagonistic interests of ordinary people and the establishment.

This does not mean that other topics discussed in the referendum campaign, such as economics or state sovereignty, were not characterized by populism, but - as it had been shown earlier - the clash of elites with the “common” people and a reluctant or even hostile attitude towards foreigners best characterize tabloid populism.

Immigration as a threat to the interests of ordinary Britons

Statistical analyses showed that the three tabloids examined published a total of 1321 articles during the referendum campaign that referred to the issue of migration or immigrants, as presented in Table 2.

According to M. Moore and G. Ramsey ([2016](#), p. 71) from King’s College London, who analyzed the content of major news channels, press titles and news portals in the same period, the topic of immigration was raised in 4383 articles (information materials),

European rules of free movement, and this depletes Britain’s resources in terms of jobs, housing, social care, health care and, education and other public services, and as a result, ordinary Britons lose out. Secondly, immigration poses a risk to public security, which would be much smaller if the UK left the EU (Zappettini, [2020](#), p. 11). In both cases, immigration was presented as a phenomenon beyond the control of the authorities imposed by the EU. It was therefore argued that Brexit would make it possible to regain control over this process.

“The Daily Express” bombarded its readers with titles that indicated that they were dealing with a real flood of immigrants, the scale of which would grow dynamically as long as the country remained in the EU. Examples included the headlines: “Immigrants pay just £100 to invade UK” (The Daily Express, June 1, [2016](#)), “20,000 migrants ready to cross into UK” (The Daily Express, June 3, [2016](#)), “Migrant intercepted every 6 minutes” (The Daily Express, June 10, [2016](#)) and the warning from Brexit ideologue Nigel Farage “There will be bodies on our beaches” (The Daily Express, June 4, [2016](#)). The message of the publication was simple - the British should be afraid because the country is at the mercy of the EU and the leaders of gangs smuggling migrants by boat across the English Channel.

“The Daily Mail” added to the feeling of immigration threats by warning: “We cannot deport killers and rapists from the EU” (The Daily Mail, June 3, [2016](#)). The category was then expanded to include robbers, paedophiles and drug dealers. According to the Daily, they are difficult to get rid of because the government is powerless, yet there are over 13,000 foreign criminals in the UK - the size of a small city - either in prison or on the streets. Many foreigners, after serving their sentences, avoid deportation, citing human rights regulations. A few days later, The Daily sounded the alarm again: „A double Albanian killer has been living in open Britain for 18 years” (The Daily Mail, June 8, [2016](#)), from which readers could learn that the Albanian was not wanted by the police, although he remains wanted by Interpol, he received a British passport in 1998 by posing as a refugee from Kosovo and collecting thousands of pounds in benefits by working in the informal economy and being linked to a prostitution business. The newspaper also warned of the possibility of 1.5 million Turks invading Britain: “Rage over plot to let 1.5 million Turks into Britain” (The Daily Mail, June 12, [2016](#)). The conspiracy was said to be a joint work of the British government and EU bureaucrats, who wanted to make a “symbolic gesture towards Turkey” by granting visa-free travel to Turkey’s 75 million population.

“The Sun”, relatively the most restrained of the three tabloids surveyed in terms of the severity of its opinions, also played into the narrative of fear of a flood of immigrants. Just before the referendum, it warned that “a huge crowd of 300 migrants is storming the port of Calais in a brutal attempt to smuggle them into the UK” (The Sun, June 21, [2016](#)). Eyewitnesses quoted by the newspaper spoke of chaos, aggression, and immigrants throwing

bricks. In addition to the crime story, many articles were devoted to the negative impact of immigration on the British labour market and the social benefits system. According to “The Sun”, in 2015, out of five job vacancies, four were held by immigrants, so the British were discriminated against, which later turned out to be untrue (The Sun, May 19, [2016](#)). The tabloid also signalled that immigrants, or at least a significant part of them, come to the UK only for benefits, and what is worse, even when they take up work, they receive benefits. An immigrant from Bulgaria explained to the newspaper that since the benefit was on offer, it should be collected; he receives £50 a week in benefits, but “this could be spent in a pub in ten minutes” (The Sun, May 21, [2016](#)). The immigrant quoted was - according to The Sun - one of 1.6 million EU migrants who moved to the UK in the last five years who received a total of £886 million in support each year - housing benefit, jobseeker’s allowance and sickness benefit.

The situation could get much worse because, as “The Sun” points out in another article, “staggering figures show five million migrants have become EU citizens in just six years” (The Sun, May 13, [2016](#)). This statistic comes from Migration Watch, which reported that net migration from the EU to the UK could average 320,000 people a year over the next two decades. According to the author, the population of Great Britain may increase annually by a city the size of Coventry. The tabloid states that everyone has the right to become a British citizen, but the huge numbers indicated make the system inefficient and require regulation. The conclusion is that “this opportunity should be used to get out of the EU” (The Sun, May 21, [2016](#)).

The message of the three tabloids on the issue of immigration was clear in its basic direction: immigration and immigrants contribute to the breakdown of “healthy” British society, and only Brexit will allow Britain to regain authentic Britishness. “Mass immigration and EU membership are the twin forces destroying our nationality” said regular commentator of The Daily Express, Leo McKinsty, adding that “Brexit is the only hope for regaining our national identity” (The Daily Express, May 26, [2016](#)).

Establishment (elites) in anti-EU tabloids

From the beginning of the campaign, both the tabloids supporting Brexit and those supporting remaining in the European Union reduced a serious political problem to a simple populist scheme: a fight between the establishment (elites), which

exploit the EU, and ordinary people (nation) who suffer the unpleasant consequences of membership. However, the understanding of the concept of “establishment” or “elite” was not entirely clear because populist newspapers treated their meaning with great discretion. They unanimously included the government (but not all ministers), governmental and international institutions, including the Treasury, the Bank of England, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the OECD and the World Bank. The establishment also included English politicians who were against leaving the EU, while on the side of the people stood politicians, even incumbent ministers, who supported Brexit. The hostile elites included all “Eurocrats” - a term resulting from the association of the European Union with bureaucracy - i.e. people associated with Brussels or the European Commission. Foreign politicians such as Barack Obama and Angela Merkel easily fit into the elite ranks (Moore & Ramsey, 2017, p. 156).

Generally, however, membership in the establishment was assumed, discretionary, and not defined. Sometimes the establishment were Londoners juxtaposed with the rest of the country’s inhabitants; the terms “political establishment”, “economic establishment”, “metropolitan elite”, “EU elite”, “political elite” were often used. The elite

have usually been characterized as “unelected” and “self-serving”, but many elected politicians have been identified with the people (Moore & Ramsey, 2017, p. 157).

One “The Daily Mail” commentator managed to highlight four pejorative references to the establishment: the metropolitan political elite, the ivory tower elites, the Hampstead liberals and the “talking” metropolitan tycoons. At the same time, he collided with two different worlds: the unreal world in which elites move and the real world - that of ordinary people. In the latter, “the second debate on the EU referendum is taking place. This is a debate by people who don’t listen to the CBI’s views or the international chatter of people like Christine Lagarde of the IMF or the Governor of the Bank of England, and who didn’t watch the last two-hour televised debate because they had better things to do, like looking for a family doctor. This is a debate between millions of working-class people who don’t care what political party leaders have to say because, in their opinion, Westminster has long since lost their trust” (The Daily Mail, June 11, 2016).

The statistical analysis shows that the three tabloids examined during the referendum campaign referred to the establishment (elites) in 316 articles, with the term “establishment” used in 149 and “elites” in 167 articles, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3:

Number of articles in the analyzed tabloids referring to the establishment (elites)

Newspaper	Establishment	Elite
The Daily Express	68	74
The Daily Mail	48	70
The Sun	33	23

Source: Own study based on Moore, M., & Ramsay, G. (2017). *UK media coverage of the 2016 EU referendum campaign*. Centre for the Study of Media, Communication and Power (p. 152).

The presented data show that among the surveyed tabloids that strongly support leaving the European Union, “The Sun” published the smallest number of articles referring to the establishment/elites. Interestingly, unlike the other two newspapers, “The Sun” used the term “establishment” more often than “elite”.

The analysis of publications on Brexit issues during the referendum campaign conducted by Moore and Ramsay indicates that the total number of articles (information materials) in which the issue of the establishment or elites appeared was 1183, of which the term “establishment” was used 547 times, while “elites” 636 times (Moore & Ramsay, 2017, p. 152).

This means that three tabloids strongly supporting Brexit had a significant twenty-seven percent share in these publications. Only the opinion-forming „The Guardian” clearly towered over each of them, but in this newspaper, the terms „establishment” or „elites” were used in a different context, not as a fight between the elites and the common people, but presented conflicting opinions on whether the elites would be in favour of remaining or leaving the EU. Brexit, according to some authors of „The Guardian”, was perceived as a struggle between the „British establishment” and the „European establishment” (Moore & Ramsay, 2017, p. 153).

The examined tabloids described the relations

between elites and ordinary people more clearly. For example, The Daily Express often dazzled its readers with the word “fury”, which was intended to reflect the reaction of ordinary people to the actions of the establishment. Prime Minister D. Cameron caused fury when he proposed a list of pro-EU politicians to be honoured by the Queen, a ceremony that takes place twice a year. According to the daily, people are fed up with the establishment rewarding each other, an act that borders on corruption. “The British people will simply no longer tolerate what Brussels, Cameron or his newly honoured associates are doing” (The Daily Express, June 11, [2016](#)). The International Monetary Fund was also outraged when it intended to publish another report on the economic impact of Brexit just before the referendum (The Daily Express, May 13, [2016](#)). In the opinion of the tabloid’s interlocutors, the EU-funded International Monetary Fund should not interfere in the national democratic debate a week before Election Day, and if it does, it is done at the request of the government, which wants to scare the British people with unfavourable economic indicators in order to weaken the will to leave the EU.

For Sarah Vine, a commentator for „The Daily Mail”, the gap between the Brussels elite and ordinary people was obvious. The European Union is an organization of elites, not ordinary people; those who support remaining in the EU do so against national interests: “The EU responds to fat bosses who earn millions because workers` wages are stagnant due to immigration”. She reinforced her message by adding, “I would have voted to remain in the past. Now I would rather burn my ballot than support these bullies and fear mongers” (The Daily Mail, June 22, [2016](#)).

Eurocrats are the group that was most attacked and identified by “The Daily Mail” with the sinister, luxurious establishment. They spent tens of millions of pounds on trips to luxury resorts, expensive meals and private jet flights, according to the newspaper. EU officials` spending also included “Caribbean cruises, thousands of pounds of alcohol and chocolate and team-building days” (The Daily Mail, June 14, [2016](#)). The data, as the Daily emphasizes, were taken from the website of the European Commission, which lists so-called „discretionary spending”. Quoting the comment of anti-EU minister Priti Patel, the tabloid stressed that EU officials also spend ordinary Britons` money in this way: “Eurocrats think they can get away with living the high standard at our expense. They have been trying to hide these expenses for years”. This comes at a time when most families have been hit hard by the financial crisis and are struggling

to make ends meet, “but EU officials are using our money to finance their jokes and exorbitant claims” (The Daily Mail, June 14, [2016](#)).

“The Daily Mail” did not hesitate to respond to US President Obama himself, who appealed to the British to remain in the European Union, believing that Great Britain outside the EU would be at the “end of the queue” during important talks. Toby Young retorted: “The British don’t respond well to threats. We will make a decision on June 23, and President Obama’s intervention has probably made it slightly more likely that we will vote to leave the EU” (The Daily Mail, June 24, [2016](#)).

The Sun did not mince its words when confronting the plans of EU officials with the needs of ordinary citizens. The Daily accused the EU of adopting shock tactics to citizens who are afraid of the unknown, calling it „the damn arrogance of our ruling EU elite” (The Sun, May 22, [2016](#)). Commentator Trevor Kavanagh gave three reasons to leave the EU: it is irresponsible, unelected, and undemocratic and treats its citizens with contempt; EU leaders are failing in the face of a real crisis, such as the conflict in the Balkans and mass immigration; currency Euro is on the verge of a catastrophic collapse. At the same time, he attacked the domestic ruling elites, stating that “no one in Downing Street seriously believes that the sky will fall if we wave goodbye to Brussels. Otherwise, as responsible ministers, they would have taken all necessary steps to avoid it” (The Sun, May 22, [2016](#)).

In its articles criticizing the establishment, “The Sun” struck patriotic notes or referred to the national pride of the British people. But also, in probably its most famous campaign material (“BeLeave in Britain”), it clearly stated that the establishment has a global reach: “the campaign to remain in the EU led by the corporate establishment, arrogant Europhiles and foreign banks aims to scare us all life outside the EU. Their “Project Fear” strategy predicts mass unemployment, skyrocketing interest rates and inflation, plummeting house prices, and even world war. The Treasury, the Bank of England, the IMF and world leaders have been roped in by Downing Street to add their grim warnings” (The Sun, June 13, [2016](#)). It called for a return to the principle that Britain should be governed by politicians elected or removed every five years, rather than foreign bureaucrats.

Using the method of clashing the interests of various social groups, the examined tabloids presented Brexit as an opportunity for ordinary Britons, hard-working people, both for economic and dignity reasons. They agreed on the basic message - society will be much better off outside the EU (Zappettini,

2020, p. 17). At the same time, the previously described patterns were repeated, thus highlighting the antagonistic interests of selected groups (British vs EU immigrants), as well as freeing themselves from the economic yoke of the EU (British vs neoliberals), which was supposed to result in lower taxes.

Using this type of narrative, “The Sun” published an article with the telling title “Boris promises cheaper gas bills for households if Britons support Brexit”, in which the main arguments of the leading advocates of leaving the European Union, Ben Johnson and Michael Gove, were cited. First of all, both politicians maintained that fuel bills would be lower for the average Briton; leaving the EU would increase wages and allow Britain to regain control over its borders. The healthcare system will be more efficient, and class differences and taxes will decrease. They concluded: „Leaving the EU is a great opportunity for us to regain control over our borders, our economy, and our democracy” (The Sun, May 30, 2016). In another edition, “The Sun” gave the floor to Labour MP John Mann, who appealed to “working people” to join the people’s revolution that was underway. According to the MP, Westminster elites will be surprised by how Labour Party members will vote for Brexit (The Sun, June 9, 2016). The free movement of people imposed by the EU undermines the wages and living conditions of the working class. It is not possible for the country’s population to increase by 300,000 new people every year. The influx has created two kinds of people: those who benefit from it and those who lose because of it. The author highlighted the different interests of the inhabitants of the metropolis and the British countryside „if you live in London and you want a cheap nanny, a gardener or a cheaper plumber, you can find really nice, really good people cheaper than before, you can go to a different restaurant every night and eat a different kind of food. In the north of England, in the Midlands, and in South Wales, people do not receive these benefits. They get problems” (The Sun, June 9, 2016).

“The Daily Mail” maintained its information and journalism in a similar tone. In one of his editorial comments, Richard Littlejohn described the EU referendum as “our last chance to escape from the disaster movie taking place across Europe” (The Daily Mail, June 21, 2016). Similarly to many other campaign messages, he juxtaposed the interests of “ordinary working people excluded from the system and the corridors of power, condemned to the worst excesses of the EU behemoth” with the particular interests of big business, merchant banks and “almost” the entire political class. He warned that

if Britons vote to join the EU, Brussels would lock the country “in an anti-democratic, corrupt federal straightjacket from which there is no escape” (The Daily Mail, June 21, 2016).

Research conclusions

The analysis showed that “The Sun”, “The Daily Express” and “The Daily Mail” were the most active and loudest titles that legitimized Brexit by referring to antagonistic social interests, nationalistic or even xenophobic threads, scaring strangers, in this case a flood of immigrants. Due to their consistent and strong anti-European message, observers of the British political scene describe them as the “Mail-Express-Sun” triad (Zappettini, 2020, p. 20).

The tabloid triad “Mail-Express-Sun” mobilized people using specific linguistic techniques that emphasized the superiority of “ordinary “British” or “hard-working people” in relation to other groups, especially immigrants and elites, defining the latter very arbitrarily. They created an imaginary reality in which an “imaginary healthy nation” was in dispute with “imaginary enemies”, both outside (the EU bureaucracy as a dominant, omnipresent force) and inside the country (corrupt elites supporting the European project).

A feature of the journalism and information of the three studied tabloids during the campaign was the frequent use of explicit words, such as “outrage”, “fury”, “attack”, “slam”, and “ridicule”, which were a negative reaction to the demands and position of supporters of remaining in the EU. Opponents’ arguments and opinions were also described as “desperate” or “hysterical”, and their behaviour was stigmatized as “scaremongering” or “fear project” (Moore & Ramsay, 2017, pp. 51-52).

The analysis showed that the tabloids were based on populist strategies referring primarily to emotions, fear, national resentments and hopes for a better tomorrow - outside the European Union. Tabloid populism manifested itself in lies, distortions, exaggerations, and, above all, disregarding information sources. Journalists of the studied titles filtered information, ensuring that the public was „properly” informed about the fundamental socio-political problems in the spirit they desired. During the referendum campaign, lies and their regular repetition seemed to strengthen the position of Brexit supporters. In the case of the „Mail-Express-Sun” triad, we can even talk about propaganda journalism.

The tabloid triad “Mail-Express-Sun” did not create a socio-political reality favourable to Brexit, but it skilfully used and fuelled the long-standing

frustration of the British people caused by the problems of everyday life.

Summary

The British media, especially anti-EU tabloids, were actively involved in the referendum campaign in 2016 and influenced its course. The three examined titles were an important link in the process of legitimizing Brexit, shaping the framework of a discourse characterized by populist and nationalist logic. Brexit became an ideological response to serious, real socio-political problems that undoubtedly affected the British people on a daily basis.

The arguments for leaving the European Union were based largely on an exclusionary rather than inclusive form of populism. Content analysis of the examined tabloids showed a manipulative, emotional use of immigration issues, dazzling recipients with false information and numbers, causing fear and even social panic. Observers of British reality guided solely by the opinions of the three analyzed titles could come to the conclusion that Great Britain is a xenophobic country hostile to foreigners, although the reality is completely different. Young, educated people and residents of big cities are tolerant, and each generation entering adulthood is more liberal than the previous one.

The analysis of the British press's messages allows us to conclude that the simple presentation of facts and rational arguments, which characterized the opinion-forming, qualitative press supporting remaining in the EU, did not bring results. The facts did not work. The tabloids winning the debate were those who presented simple, emotional messages that often discredited public figures supporting the EU and used expert language. The essence of this dispute is reflected in the statement of Michael Gove, a leading supporter of Brexit: "the inhabitants of this country are fed up with experts" (Hinde, 2017, p. 85).

Populism in general and tabloid populism in particular, did not die out when Great Britain left the European Union. British tabloids are still serious actors in imposing populist discourse, legitimizing or delegitimizing certain political actions. The analysis of this type of discourse and the role of the tabloid segment of the press gives rise to further research.

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Populism in general and tabloid populism in particular, did not die out when Great Britain left the European Union. British tabloids are still serious actors in imposing populist discourse, legitimizing or delegitimizing certain political actions. The analysis of this type of discourse and the role of the tabloid segment of the press gives rise to further research.

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Between commerce and mission: the case of TRUSO.TV, a local television station

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new media, local television stations, local media, cable television, commerce vs. mission.

ABSTRACT

Topics covered by local media will always have their own audience. One of the advantages of local media is the ability to create content specifically formatted for Internet users (e.g., live broadcasts or video content). It can be assumed that both the value and quality of the presented information depend on the journalistic skill level of the local editorial team. The way new media are handled reflects the state of traditional media. Those with an established reputation that has been built over years of fulfilling a social mission do not need to fear new technologies but should instead view them as an addition and a way to build credibility and trust among new viewers.

New media allow local stations to engage audiences in local community affairs, providing diverse content (cultural, educational, sports and entertainment programmes) that responds to a wide range of audience interests. This is evident in the case of TRUSO.TV, which produces a variety of content formats. Local television stations require constant funding, typically supported by advertisements from local businesses. However, the current media consumption trends may affect the effectiveness of these advertisements.

This article has attempted to demonstrate that a local television station with a long-standing tradition does not need to fear losing its audience. Despite the growing importance of new media, local broadcasters play a crucial role in local communication. It should be noted, however, that the conclusions regarding TRUSO.TV cannot be extrapolated to cable television stations in other cities. Elbląg is where television has existed for 30 years, giving it a brand and recognition among its residents, which may facilitate fulfilling its mission.

Introduction

The concept of “new media” has undergone significant transformation since the 1970s, reflecting the dynamic development of technologies and forms of communication. Over time, the distinction between “old” and “new” media has become more pronounced, though scholars remain divided on how to define the term precisely. The continuous evolution of media technologies requires researchers to adapt their tools regularly. This issue becomes particularly crucial in the context of local media, where survival in the digital age often depends on navigating in a dynamic and uncertain virtual environment.

The case of TRUSO.TV, a local television station in Elbląg, illustrates how local broadcasters strive to adapt to changing conditions by leveraging new media platforms, such as social media, to fulfil their mission. This paper aims to explore the role of new media in the operation of local media, particularly within the framework of local communication. It also seeks to answer the key question: can local broadcasters sustain their activities independently in the digital environment?

The term “new media” has been used in the academic literature since the 1970s. Today’s understanding of this notion has little in common with what it meant several decades ago. A boundary has

emerged separating “old media” from “new media”, though researchers do not share the same viewpoint on this matter. Roman Konik believes this may be due to the “multipolarity of media development processes and their multi-layered interaction” (2016, p. 21). The author characterizes new media in communicative, sociological, aesthetic, technological and practical contexts. When analyzing the issue of new media, attention should be paid to their historical evolution and changes in both operational models and aspirations. Additionally, new media technologies age quickly. Their dynamic nature causes them to be replaced by newer solutions. It is necessary to continually adapt research and theories to these changes (Konik, 2016, p. 22). As Krzysztof Wasilewski writes, the scientific contribution regarding the impact of new media is insufficient, with the local communication system being the most susceptible to changes brought about by the development of the Internet (Wasilewski, 2014, p. 163-154).

This paper attempts to answer the following research questions: How do traditional media fulfil their role and mission when faced with new media? Can a local broadcaster independently function and sustain broadcasting activities in a virtual communication environment? It seems that a definitive answer to this question does not exist. It

could be assumed that the development of the Internet affects traditional media. However, the proper use of social networking sites may allow a local television station to fulfil its mission not only within its regional area.

Conversely, improper use or poor management of communication channels may hasten their decline. An additional goal of this article is to present unique research findings regarding the use of new media by a local television station and to analyze their significance in local communication. The findings from the research may help adopt the strategy to reach audiences and give small broadcasters a chance to survive. The subject of analysis is the Elbląg market, specifically the only cable television operating in the city, TRUSO.TV.

Local media

Commercial television in Poland dates back to the early 1990s, emerging as an alternative to the existing national channels owned by the state monopoly - Polish Television (Telewizja Polska). The first stations operated mainly in local areas, often broadcasting illegally due to the lack of proper legal regulations. This situation lasted until the first licences were granted under the Broadcasting Act, which was passed in 1992. Local television stations in Poland are closely tied to cable networks. Viewers have always had high expectations for this medium, often considering it a form of public television (Filas, 2012, p. 11). According to Ryszard Kowalczyk, local media fulfil their role by informing residents of specific local government units (municipality, district, province) about current events in their area. They address issues important to residents as well as watch over the actions of local authorities (Kowalczyk, 2008, p. 97). In addition, they serve as an important room for dialogue as well as exchange of ideas, viewpoints and opinions. They became a tool for social influence, communication and passing information. Local media should be defined as a means of gathering, selecting, shaping, preserving and diffusing information (Balczyńska-Kosman, 2010, p. 112). Grażyna Piechota writes that one of the strengths of local media is their ability to cover topics that are relevant and close to the audience (2011, p. 78).

Local media categorization can be based on the way of preserving information [printed (press) and electronic (the Internet, television, radio)] and on the scope of its distribution [regional (one province), sub-regional (several districts), micro-regional (district and city with district rights), local (municipality or

city with municipal rights), and sub-local (district, housing estate, village)]. The range of broadcasts affects the scope of interest for local media. This distinction is fading due to the Internet, which is being used to broadcast traditional media, including local media. The Internet also provides space for creating interactive tools for social communication (Kowalczyk, 2008, p. 90-94). Smaller owners run over 150 local television stations that broadcast in Poland. It is common for local newspapers, television stations, and online portals to be run by individuals or groups of people connected to the area. Local Newspapers Association [Stowarzyszenie Gazet Lokalnych] and Local Media Association [Stowarzyszenie Mediów Lokalnych] are organizations that bring together such entities (Local Newspapers Association, 2024). They aim to represent local media's interests and highlight their role in society. In addition, they provide space for experience exchange among their owners. The existence of such organizations is key to maintaining the independence of local media (Local Media Association, 2024). There is also the Polish Local and Regional Television Association [Polskie Telewizje Lokalne i Regionalne] based in Elbląg, which brings leaders of local media from across Poland together. It represents 50 local television broadcasters that air their programmes in over 180 cities (Polish Local and Regional Television Association, 2024). According to the research conducted by the National Media Institute (Krajowy Instytut Mediów), the viewership of local television stations in Poland stands at 4.9 million. The most popular stations include WTK, followed by lubelska.tv and TV Olsztyn. TRUSO.TV, a local television station in Elbląg, has 37,195 viewers (2024).

One challenge that local media are faced with is the emergence of media operated by local authorities, which may impact their independence. Dorota Głowska and Adam Pliszka state that authorities should not manage media but create space for them to function freely. Additionally, there is no legal basis for local governments to run their media, as such actions violate Article 7 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, namely the principle of lawfulness (2014, p. 75-83). Another issue is the discretionary nature of public institutions and related entities in commissioning advertisements and other paid content — a problem that does not affect only the local level but also much bigger broadcasters. A further challenge is lawsuits filed against local journalists, which can significantly hinder their work. This highlights how crucial the protection of freedom of speech is for the functioning of democratic

journalism. Finally, local media often face resistance from institutions that sometimes refuse to cooperate, making it difficult for independent local media to obtain information. These media must often repeatedly request, verify and confirm information, which is even more challenging when the provided information is incomplete or irrelevant. This issue illustrates that pro-municipal or pro-government media have an easier time obtaining and publishing information as they operate in line with the authorities' expectations (Freedom Foundation, [2023](#), p. 9-13).

The presented challenges are not exhaustive but have been outlined due to their impact on the reliability and sustainability of local media. A potential solution could be the abolition of government-run media, the change of laws regarding defamation and the protection of freedom of speech, and the implementation of local media public support programs, which would let them maintain their independence (Batko-Tołuć, 2024).

Three decades of TRUSO.TV.

TRUSO.TV is the longest-operating non—public medium in Elbląg. It has been producing daily news programmes, magazines, documentaries and other television formats for three decades. It documents events and the city's history and actively contributes to shaping them. Because of the programmes, the residents can better understand the region's culture and heritage. Many local creators have gained deserved recognition and attention on its air. As Juliusz Marek, a former owner of a local medium, admits, local television in Elbląg has become a permanent part of contemporary city life, becoming a piece of its modern history.

Going back to 1990, when the first local elections in free Poland were held, and the Elbląg Voivodeship still existed, the press and electronic media beyond the city focused mainly on the provincial authorities. The city was not a point of interest due to the small scale of events and its many challenges, which were practically in every aspect of life. However, a reflection that these numerous problems could be addressed more effectively through communication with the public emerged soon. The only existing local newspaper — an organ of the Provincial Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party [Komitet Wojewódzki PZPR], published weekly Elbląg News [Wiadomości Elbląskie] — ceased its publication in the winter of 1990. Attempts were made to replace it with other publications, but none succeeded, and Elbląg Press gradually started to lose its readership.

A station founded by the Elbląg Radio Broadcasting Development Society [Towarzystwo Rozwoju Rozgłośni Radiowej w Elblągu], called Radio-El, was a pioneer in the success of local media. The efforts of then-editor-in-chief Witold Werner gave the station immense popularity in the city and surrounding areas, even before it was officially licensed. It began broadcasting on June 10, 1992. The radio covered key events, addressed the concerns of Elbląg residents and carried out numerous initiatives for the local community. It operated until 2012 when it was replaced by Radio Elbląg (Cultural Lexicon, [2024](#)). In 1993, a tender was announced for the construction of a cable network in the city. The project of VECTRA Cable Television Ltd. from Gdynia [Telewizja Kablowa VECTRA Sp. z o.o z Gdyni] was chosen from the submitted offers. It included 18 television programmes, mostly foreign, with a local channel featuring text-based messages. A year later, the first television broadcasts aired, including coverage of New Year's Eve celebrations, the Elbląg edition of the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity [Wielka Orkiestra Świątecznej Pomocy] and the Miss Elbląg beauty pageant. On March 13, the first Reporter programme aired, and it was intended to be a weekly news programme. The station began regular broadcasts in August under the name Vectra-El Television [Telewizja Vectra-El], with minimal technical resources: a small room, one camera, a VCR and a computer. This was enough to produce a half-hour programme on Saturdays and Sundays. Over time, the station expanded, gaining new premises (a hallway in a hotel annexe on Jaśminowa Street), where the main station was established and a small television studio was created. In 1995, a daily programme called Elbląg News [Wiadomości Elbląskie] began to air at 05:30 p.m., then repeated at 08:00 p.m. and 10:00 p.m. VECTRA obtained its first broadcasting license in 1996, and the programme was registered as Vectra-El Television (Telewizja Vectra-El). Further licences, under the name Elbląg Television (Telewizja Elbląska), were issued in 2002, at which point Juliusz Marek became its licensee and owner. Today, the broadcaster is TRUSO Media Ltd. in Elbląg, and the programme is called TRUSO.TV (Cultural Lexicon, [2024](#)). Over the years, the station has undergone several programming changes, provided airtime to young Elbląg residents and hosted programmes created by "e-światowid" television. As early as 2009, it also appeared online and posted its content on tv.elblag.pl, it allowed over a thousand people from Poland and abroad to share their materials via the website (Marek, [2009](#), p. 477-

489).

TRUSO.TV is a private broadcaster operating on its own budget. It fulfils a mission typical for public media — informing about important events and promoting local sports. It also performs educational, cultural, integrative and opinion-forming functions. Over the past thirty years, it has broadcast nearly 10,000 episodes of Elbląg News [Wiadomości Elbląskie] and other programmes focusing on history, education, information and public affairs. The digitalization of television was also a part of Elbląg's medium history. In 2008, Elbląg Television was included in the operator's digital programming offerings, expanding its viewership. A year later, the residents of Braniewo gained access to the programme. Today, TRUSO.TV reaches a wider audience through VECTRA's cable network, broadcasting to 20 cities across the Warmian-Masurian and Pomeranian provinces. According to research conducted by the National Media Institute [Krajowy Instytut Mediów], the viewership of local television stations in Poland is 4.9 million, and TRUSO.TV has 37,195 viewers (KIM, 2024). Over the years, the station has faced many challenges. The first was financial; due to this fact, it began producing commercials that have been in high demand among local businesses since 2000. However, changes in customer habits and the rise of online shopping are just some factors that have led to a decline in the value of advertising on local television. The second challenge was maintaining journalistic independence. The third was the lack of qualified staff, as local media are often a starting point for journalists and camera operators who seek to advance their careers in larger media centres. The fourth challenge was competition, which today exists mainly on the Internet—it is cheaper to run and can be operated by a single person. All these factors affect the ability of local media to carry out their mission.

TRUSO.TV as an example of new media

Magdalena Szpunar, who hypothesizes that the emergence of new media does not eliminate traditional media but leads to their coexistence and interaction, presents media change as focusing on the convergence between new and traditional media. Szpunar emphasizes that new media introduce a new quality of communication that differs from traditional forms yet does not entirely replace them. She argues that new media are characterized by interactivity, enabling users to participate actively in communication. Users cease to be passive recipients and can influence the content and its presentation. She points out that new media bring forth new features

and possibilities, such as information accessibility, the ability to modify content, and interactive forms of communication. A crucial aspect of her analysis is that traditional media do not disappear in the face of new technologies; instead, they adapt and interact with new media, which can enhance the media offering. The author highlights the significance of these changes for media culture and how consumers engage with media content, which is essential for understanding the contemporary media landscape (2020, p. 45-67).

Henry Jenkins defines media convergence as a process in which content flows between different media platforms and various media industries collaborate. In his view, convergence also encompasses the migratory behaviours of media audiences, meaning that users consume content and actively participate in its creation and distribution. Jenkins emphasizes that convergence does not eliminate old media; rather, it leads to their interaction with new forms of communication, resulting in new media models and a changing communication landscape (2008, p. 15-30).

For local television stations, being present on Facebook is a chance to survive on the market and a way to fulfil their mission. Through this platform, they can play an important role in informing and educating local residents. Additionally, it allows them to build an audience and interact with viewers, which results in active engagement in regional matters. Social media also provide space for wide-reaching promotion of events and initiatives, which can contribute to revitalizing the local economy. Rafał Polak indicates that local media have a significant impact on building the identity of local communities and on integrating residents. By reporting on local events and promoting social initiatives, the media contribute to the activation of residents. He also addresses the challenges local media face, such as competition from national media and new technologies that are changing how information is consumed (2009, p. 110-120).

The television station in Elbląg had to adapt to the times. Initially, its website served as an informational portal containing contact details and programming information. As the habits of the new generation evolved, changes were made to attract and retain viewers. Facebook became a key tool, with quick and diverse content in short forms capturing the attention of Elbląg residents. The social media page has 24,000 followers (TRUSO TV, 2024). It features posts about Elbląg and occasionally the surrounding region. Historical photographs and recordings from past decades bring the city's history

to life. This approach to managing the page requires a new outlook on journalism, focusing on engaging the audience and encouraging interaction. As Anna Miotk writes, social media is for those whose target groups are already present on such platforms (2013, p. 81). It can be assumed that the target audience for local television is active in new media since every Internet user resides in a specific region and likely wants to know what is happening in the area. The Internet brings this information closer (Siudak, in. Babecki, Żyliński, 2016, p. 160). The purpose of analyzing the content of posts was to identify the thematic scope of the published materials. The posts were categorized thematically, and the frequency of each type of content in April was determined.

TRUSO.TV, as a modern medium, introduces several differences compared to traditional forms of communication, such as television or print media. Here are the key aspects that distinguish them. TRUSO.TV. It engages viewers through interactive live broadcasts and the ability to comment and share content on social media platforms, unlike traditional media, which often have a one-way communication flow, TRUSO.TV allows viewers to participate actively in programs and discussions. Modern media, such as TRUSO.TV, leverages digital technologies, enabling rapid content updates and responsiveness to current events. Traditional media often adhere to fixed schedules and longer production cycles, which can limit their ability to react swiftly to changes (KRRiT, 2023). It tailors its programs to the local needs and interests of the community, enhancing their appeal. Traditional media often provide more homogeneous content that may not address the specific needs of diverse audience groups (Goniak, 2012, p. 163-187). The presence of TRUSO.TV on platforms such as Facebook and YouTube allows for a broader reach to audiences and facilitates dialogue with viewers. Traditional media have limited interactive capabilities compared to modern platforms. It enables viewers to watch content at any time and from any location due to its online availability. In contrast, traditional media often require access to a television or radio at a specific time. TRUSO.TV differs from traditional media through its interactivity, speed of communication, content personalization, and the use of modern digital technologies. These features make the station more flexible and better suited to

the needs of contemporary audiences, establishing it as an example of a new medium in the digital age (TRUSO TV, 2024).

Thematic scope of TRUSO.TV posts in April [%]

The analysis conducted in the paper aimed to understand how local media, specifically TRUSO.TV, engages its community through various forms of content published on Facebook. The methodology was based on the following steps:

1. Facebook was chosen as the primary channel for analysis due to its popularity among local communities and the fact that TRUSO.TV actively uses this medium to communicate with viewers.
2. The posts selected for the analysis were identified based on their interactions (likes, comments, shares) and the diversity of formats (video, text, graphics). The focus was on posts that generated significant community reactions, indicating their potential impact on local social life.
3. The posts underwent both qualitative and quantitative analysis. This involved examining the number of interactions and the content and context of the posts to understand their role in building social bonds and local cultural identity.

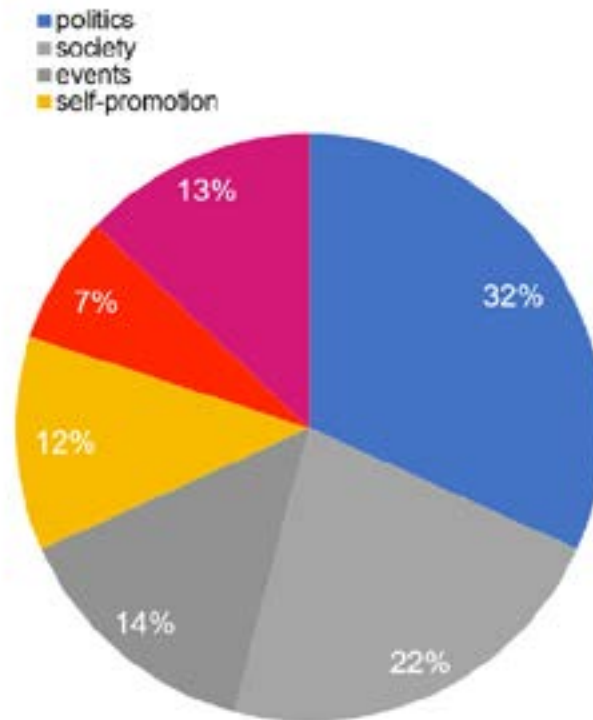
In summary, the selection of specific posts for analysis was driven by their high level of interaction and format diversity. Posts related to sports events, changes in public spaces, or local cultural initiatives were particularly significant because they represent key topics, address issues important to the residents of Elbląg, generate discussion, and indicate a high level of community engagement with the discussed themes. They display various content and illustrate different approaches to communication and audience engagement.

The aim of the analysis was to investigate the role of local media. This included understanding how TRUSO.TV influences social interactions within the local community, identifying effective communication strategies, determining which content formats generate the highest engagement and why, and reflecting on the value of content. The study sought to examine how the type of published content affects the community's perception of local media and its role in public life.

Chart 1:

The author's research is based on the analysis of TRUSO. TV's Facebook page.

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/TrusoTV> [accessed: 01.05.2024].



In total, 84 posts were published on Facebook in April. Most were related to political and social topics and presented in various forms, such as short reports from politicians' press conferences or interviews with newly elected city officials. Social topics covered investments in the city, new support programs for people with disabilities offered by the Elbląg Social Services Centre (Elbląskie Centrum Usług Społecznych) and updates to tram stop signs.

A significant portion of the Facebook space was dedicated to events—mainly video invitations to events organized by Elbląg institutions such as the Elbląg Hospice of Doctor Aleksandra Gabrysiak, MOSIR Elbląg, the Elbląg Library and the EL-Active Sports Promotion Association. The third most common category was posts related to culture, education and sports, including coverage of rehearsals at the Aleksander Sewruk Theater for the play *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* and the opening of a roller rink at the city ice rink. The second-to-last category

was self-promotion, featuring content such as the *Our Elbląg* ("Nasz Elbląg") local government magazine, promotional spots like *Don't Sleep or You'll Be Voted Out*, presidential debates, and the *It's Worth Knowing* (Warto wiedzieć) programme, all produced by TRUSO Media Ltd., the local broadcaster of TRUSO.TV.

The least frequent category was "Other", which included posts about accidents, interventions or court cases. The first conclusion from the analysis is that the high number of presented content types might prevent viewers from becoming bored, as they are delivered in different ways: long and short reports from conferences, videos with background music and no commentary or stand-up announcements for upcoming local events. Direct video uploads without additional links are popular and result in more views and reactions. This is evident in a one-minute post about the *Energa Basketball Elbląg* game, which received 207 likes, six comments and ten shares.

Image 1:

Analysis of TRUSO.TV's Facebook page

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/TrusoTV> [accessed: 01.05.2024]



[Translation of the text from the image: They showed a real fighting spirit! Energa Basketball Elbląg team was promoted to the second league. Congratulations!]

While other media outlets, especially commercial ones, offer their viewers more modern ways of accessing content, local television tends to rely on safer solutions, such as maintaining a Facebook account. However, as the content analysis shows, promoting one's materials can lead viewers to resent the poster. Dorota Jędrzejewska and Rafał Niemczyk note that social media communication should be conducted thoughtfully. In their view, Facebook should not serve as an advertising board, as overloading users with information is a flawed strategy. Instead, providing users with value-added content, such as helpful information or practical tips, is better supported by original graphics or special

offers (2013, p. 102). These types of content can be found while analyzing TRUSO.TV's profile. They could bring even greater success to the broadcaster if properly managed. Jerzy Mikułowski-Pomorski points out that local media do not play a key role in forming strong social bonds at the local level. They may strengthen or weaken existing ties, but their role is not to actively build social bonds (1990, p. 269-270). However, one could agree that local media play a significant role in public life. They serve as a platform for opinions and viewpoints, as seen in the social media content regarding the restoration of city walls.

Image 2:

Analysis of TRUSO.TV's Facebook page.

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/TrusoTV> [accessed: 01.05.2024].



Translation of the text from the image: The medieval walls that once surrounded the Church of the Blessed Virgin Mary, now home to the El Art Centre Gallery, will be secured. It is worth mentioning that the entire area of the current El Gallery, including the walls, once belonged to the Dominican monks and holds an intriguing history, which was shared with us by the invaluable Leszek Marcinowski from the PTTK (Polish Tourist and Sightseeing Society) Elbląg Branch.

The above post generated nearly 250 reactions, 7 comments and 34 shares. In today's communication, even a "like" or "heart" can express opinions — whether in favour of or against a particular issue. Stanisław Michalczyk writes that: "Informed people, aware of both the sense and possibilities of collective and individual action to meet their individual, collective or social needs, become more engaged and effective on both an individual and social level. The place where people can live like this becomes closer to them, beyond simply being their place of birth or residence".

The opinions presented confirm that local media significantly shapes social bonds and local cultural

identity. They affect the quality of interpersonal relationships, although they do not play a creative role. As Grażyna Piechota notes, local media do not create bonds. Instead, they strengthen and maintain the existing community by reflecting the actions of the local society. Jeremy Rifkin writes that effective communication should be tailored to the social or cultural context in which it takes place. This means using the appropriate language and form of communication to achieve the desired effect.

Another example supporting these arguments is a post announcing a parking ban near Elbląg Cathedral. Although the topic might seem minor, the post sparked significant engagement as it addressed a

Image 3:

Analysis of TRUSO.TV's Facebook page.

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/TrusoTV> [accessed: 01.05.2024].

Truso.tv
18 kwietnia o 16:32 · 🌐

Koniec z całodniowym parkowaniem 🚗🚗 pod kościołem św. Mikołaja. 🛑 Co o tym sądziecie?

Kliknij, aby rozwinąć

0:15 / 0:30

Maraton Elbląski i 308 innych użytkowników 88 komentarzy 14 udostępnień

Lubię to! Komentarz Udostępnij

Translation of the text from the image: No more parking near the Elbląg Cathedral.
What do you think about it?

change affecting Old Town residents who frequently park near the church. The video accompanying the announcement generated numerous comments, likes, and shares.

Zygmunt Bauman and Tim May state that the world comes to the recipients, even if they do not move. This happens through electronically transmitted voices and images — “this process of detaching communication from local constraints causes communication ties to become asymmetrical” (2004, p. 160).

Conclusion

Topics covered by local media will always have their own audience. One of the advantages of local media is the ability to create content specifically formatted for Internet users (e.g., live broadcasts or video content).

It can be assumed that both the value and quality of the presented information depend on the journalistic skill level of the local editorial team. The way new media are handled reflects the state of traditional media. Those with an established reputation that has been built over years of fulfilling a social mission do not need to fear new technologies but should instead view them as an addition and a way to build credibility and trust among new viewers.

New media allow local stations to engage audiences in local community affairs, providing diverse content (cultural, educational, sports and entertainment programmes) that responds to a wide range of audience interests. This is evident in the case of TRUSO.TV, which produces a variety of content formats. Local television stations require constant


funding, typically supported by advertisements from local businesses. However, the current media consumption trends may affect the effectiveness of these advertisements.

This article has attempted to demonstrate that a local television station with a long-standing tradition does not need to fear losing its audience. Despite the growing importance of new media, local broadcasters play a crucial role in local communication. It should be noted, however, that the conclusions regarding TRUSO.TV cannot be extrapolated to cable television stations in other cities. Elbląg is where television has existed for 30 years, giving it a brand and recognition among its residents, which may facilitate fulfilling its mission.

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Hiromu Arakawa's Fullmetal Alchemist: Stylistic Nuances of the Comic Book

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comics, manga, media, Fullmetal Alchemist, analysis, art, drawing, Hiromu Arakawa

ABSTRACT

Nowadays, manga is a very popular medium, especially among young people from different areas of the world. The following article analyzes selected volumes of the manga "Fullmetal Alchemist" by Hiromu Arakawa in terms of style and visuals. This manga is one of the better-known titles and has many admirers around the world. In the analysis, the text and illustrations were examined separately. The research made it possible to determine Arakawa's style of drawing, world creation, characters, and dialogues, to mention a few, and to draw conclusions from them.

Introduction

Manga is one of the most common and beloved types of comics around the world. Japanese comics are characterized by reading from right to left, appearing in black and white, and distorted character proportions. Readers of manga are both adults and children. The word manga comes from the Chinese word 'manhua', which can be translated as improvised sketches. The first artist to use the term manga was Katsushika Hokusai, who used the word to name his volumes with caricatured drawings of people (Petersen, 2010, pp. 40-41). Osamu Tezuka is considered the creator of manga as we know it today. He published such titles as "New Treasure Island", "Astroboy", and "Jungle Emperor" (Petersen, 2010, pp. 174-176). This article aims to present the results of a stylistic and visual analysis of selected volumes of the "Fullmetal Alchemist" manga by Hiromu Arakawa, especially conclusions about the author's creation of characters.

COMICS AS AN ART FORM

Comics is an art. Form that tells a story the author created through drawing series placed in frames. Comics can occur with as well as without text; if it appears, it is embedded in dialogue bubbles (Szyłak, 2009, p. 5). The purpose of comics is to communicate between the author and the reader through illustrations and possibly text, making it a medium. In the case of comic stories without text, the author must use graphic elements that are understood identically by the audience (Szyłak, 2000, pp. 11-13). The mother fields of comics are visual arts – responsible for illustrations; literature – dialogues, narration, and all texts; and film arts – responsible for the principles of smooth transitions between frames (Birek, 2004, p. 14).

A comic strip consists of various elements, such

as frames, illustrations, dialogue bubbles, panels, characters, onomatopoeias, and titles. Any comic can consist of more or less elements. A comic frame can have different types. Their primary purpose is to direct the viewer's eye so that the plot presented makes sense, is read in sequence, and presents a change of location and time, e.g., a flashback or a dream. Movie frames are not synonymous with comic frames, because of their purpose – a comic frame is intended for print, and their importance to the plot, it can change the course of the story – a film frame lasts a short time. An entire single page filled with frames is called a comic page board. It can contain a large and small number of frames – in some cases, it can be one or half a frame (Szyłak, 2000, pp. 44-47). Dialogue bubbles contain text, which can vary in appearance depending on the type of speech. There are many variations of speech bubbles in comics – their appearance is to direct what tone of voice is shown at a given time. For example, a whisper can be shown through a bubble, which will be drawn with a dotted line; in the case of a shout, the bubble will have sharp, pointed edges. The role of onomatopoeia is to show sounds occurring in frames. Their appearance depends on the type of sound – a loud sound usually equates to a large caption and a quiet sound to a small one; with a stretch-out sound, the text will be long, and vice versa with a short sound. Illustrations placed in frames are supposed to show the plot of the story. They can be dynamic or static, depending on what the author has to convey (Szyłak, 2000, p. 110). The title serves as an identifier of a given comic strip and is supposed to encourage the viewer to read the work. It appears together with the cover (Szyłak, 2000, p. 135). The plot corresponds to how the events are presented, in what order they occur, and how the frames are set up on the pages. It can be based on fiction or real events. Usually, the

plot of a comic book concerns the fate of the main character. The worst thing that can happen is that the viewer gets bored with the plot – this often happens when the main character is incorrectly created, the pace of plot development is very slow or in the case of impenetrable prose (David, 2009, pp. 90-93).

Jerzy Szyłak (2009, pp. 7-10) calls comics the art of exaggeration because they do not show realism but caricatured images. Such a procedure aims to show important elements to the viewer, who is supposed to recognize them fairly quickly. The first primitive comics can be considered as early as prehistoric cave paintings. The current format of comics as we know it began to take shape in the 19th century. Three precursors to the art of comics can be distinguished: Rudolphe Töpffer, his student Gustav Doré and Wilhelm Busch. In those days, comic stories were slightly different from the ones we know today. The text appeared in a separate, lower part of the frame rather than in a dialogue bubble. In addition, comic strips were published mainly in newspapers as short stories with a humorous punchline. The thematic range of comics expanded in the 20th century. Stories began to be created with a variety of themes, such as didactic, melodramatic, and children's, to mention a few. Further, they began to publish them as separate books, and the most popular theme shown in them was superheroes, so it is not surprising that Marvel was successful, especially since they created slightly

different heroes – specifically, those who acquired their powers rather than were born with them (Szyłak, 2009, pp. 38-40).

Mentioning the history of comics, there can be no lack of information about Japanese manga. It appeared in the second half of the 20th century. This comic book type is quite popular among young and older audiences in the Polish market. It covers a wide range of topics, as the plot of a manga can be about everyday life, depicting cooking instructions or, dealing with fantasy or strictly adult themes (Pagon, n.d.). The Japanese portrayed the image of women and men differently. The woman was presented as innocent, delicate, and sweet – while men were courageous and brave, so they were more often chosen as the main characters. Osamu Tezuka decided to make a change. As a result, he created a female protagonist named Princess Knight – according to the author, she possessed both girlish and boyish qualities. This action inspired other creators to choose women as main characters (Petersen, 2010, pp. 180-181).

Nowadays, comics can be found almost everywhere. Its style is open to novelty; authors can create comics using stick figures, cartoons, manga or absolute realism. Comics can be created in the traditional way or digitally. In addition, due to the Internet, almost everyone has access to the works of authors worldwide.

Figure 1:

A fragment of the comic strip “Akira” Katsuhiro Ōtomo as an example of a comic strip;
<https://akiramanga.com/manga/akira-chapter-18>, online 24.11.2024



HIROMU ARAKAWA AS MANGA AUTHOR

The following paper focuses on one manga author, Hiromu Arakawa, who creates fantasy-themed comics with a fair dosage of humor. Arakawa was born in 1973 on the island of Hokkaido. From an early age, she had a passion for drawing comics (Peoplepill, [n.d.](#)). After graduating from high school, she began taking oil painting classes while continuing to help her parents with their farm work. In 1999, she moved to Tokyo, where she found employment with Square Enix as an assistant to Hiroyuki Eto – creator of the manga “Mahojin Guru Guru. Arakawa’s first authorial publication was the manga “Stray Dog”, which was published by the monthly magazine “Shonen Gangan”. Subsequently, one chapter of her comic “Shanghai Yomakikai” appeared in the same magazine. In 2001 “Shonen Gangan published the first chapter of “Fullmetal Alchemist” – her most famous work, which circulated around the world. The entire series has 108 chapters, which have been collected into 27 volumes (Kiddle, [n.d.](#)). Hiromu Arakawa worked with Bones Studio to release “Fullmetal Alchemist” as an anime series. In the end, she was not fully involved in creating the script, producing a different ending than the one in the comic book. Another version of the manga adaptation was undertaken, and this time, the comic book author informed the director of the planned ending so that they would be identical. Studio Bones is not the author’s only collaboration; she assisted Flag Studio in creating the animation “Hero Tales” (Peoplepill, [n.d.](#)). In April 2011, she took on the challenge of creating a more realistic story, resulting in “Silver Spoon”. The comic told the story of a boy who decided to attend an agricultural school, although he had no experience. The challenges and good moments of farming are shown. There is also no shortage of environmental themes, the importance of hard work, animal welfare, or sustainable development of society (Silver Spoon Wiki, [n.d.](#)).

The author’s work has been recognized, earning her such awards as the 21st Century Shounen GanGan Award, Shogakukan Manga Award – she received this award three times, Osamu Tezuka Cultural Prize, New Artist Prize (Hahnlibrary Shogakukan Manga Award, [n.d.](#)). Her works include eleven original manga: Stray Dog (1999), Totsugeki Tonari no Enikkusu (2000), Demons of Shanghai (2000), Fullmetal Alchemist (2001-2010), Raiden-18 (2005-2021), Soten no Komori (2006), Hero Tales (2006-2010), Noble Farmer (2008-present), Silver Spoon (2011-2019), The Heroic Legend of

Arslan (2013-present), Daemons of Shadow Realm (2022-present). The author chose a cow with glasses as her avatar for the reader due to her upbringing on a dairy farm (Peoplepill, [n.d.](#)).

“Fullmetal Alchemist” presents the story of two brothers, Edward and Alphonse Elric, whose main goal is to recover their lost bodies after a failed attempt to bring their mother back to life. They can achieve this goal by using the philosopher’s stone, through which the older brother - Ed, joins the army as a state alchemist. With this title, he is entitled to research grants and access to military libraries. After passing the exam, Edward is given the nickname ‘fullmetal’. The story is set in the world of alchemy created by the author, where the principle of equivalent exchange rules. The brothers live in a country ruled by the military - Amestris. The depicted world is inspired by Europe, especially England, as indicated by the depicted architecture, landscape and pronunciation of the plot (Fullmetal Alchemist Manga Online, [n.d.](#)). In addition to the previously mentioned brothers, important roles in the manga are played by such characters as Roy Mustang, Riza Hawkeye and Winry Rockbell.

The main character is Edward Elric, who has an explosive temper. He gets irritated easily, especially when someone mentions his short height. He has golden eyes and braided hair; characteristic features of his appearance are steel prosthetics and a red coat with the Flamel cross on the back, which signifies the pursuit of truth. Edward’s younger brother is Alphonse Elric, who is the opposite of Ed - calm, composed and understanding. Al lost his entire body after the incident in an attempt to resurrect his mother, but Ed managed to restore his soul to steel armor. In this form, he does not need food or sleep. His human form has short golden hair and golden eyes. Winry Rockbell is the brothers’ childhood friend and their mechanic. Winry has long blond hair tied up in a high ponytail and blue eyes. She is a cheerful, empathetic teenager who has a high sense of morality, always ready to help others. Roy Mustang supports the Elric brothers on the military side as a colonel and the state alchemist. He has dark eyes and short black hair. His characteristics are pride, trust in his subordinates, and striving. Mustang’s lieutenant is Riza Hawkeye, whom he trusts the most. She has medium-length blond hair, which she pins up in a bun, and brown eyes. She is self-controlled, disciplined and rational, often acting as a sniper. The main antagonist is a homunculus, which represents the seven deadly sins; this is how the author named each of them. Their names are Lust, Gluttony, Envy, Greed, Wrath, Pride

At the core of each of them is a philosopher's stone, so they have extraordinary regeneration abilities and individual skills, such as changing their form or an indestructible shield (Fullmetal Alchemist Wiki, [n.d.](#)).

"Fullmetal Alchemist" was published in Poland by J.P. Fantastica from 2006 to 2012, with all volumes printed as Japanese editions with right-to-left reading directions. Currently, the manga is being reissued in a deluxe version.

Figure 2:

A fragment of the comic strip "Akira" Katsuhiro Ōtomo as an example of a comic strip;
<https://akiramanga.com/manga/akira-chapter-18>, online 24.11.2024



METHODOLOGY

The research protocol involved using two analytical methods - stylistic analysis, which is a form of textual study, and visual analysis, focusing on interpreting the graphic layer of messages. The research procedure used purposive sampling - volumes 2, 14 and 26 were analyzed (to obtain a cross-sectional selection of analytical material).

As Zdunkiewicz-Jedynak (2008) writes, stylistic analysis studies a text, its features, structure and function to improve our understanding of its construction and the given message. In the case of the meter of selected volumes "Fullmetal Alchemist" translated into Polish by Paweł "Rep" Dybała, the text is mainly dialogues, so it is to them that most focus was dedicated. The stylistic study aimed to establish the features of the characters created by Hiromu

Arakawa and set in the world created by her. The second research method used was visual analysis, i.e., a study that exclusively interprets graphic elements. In her article, Grazyna Penkowska (2017) wrote that it is significant to look at such aspects as color, framing and composition in visual analysis.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Stylistic analysis:

The plot of the manga under study deals with subjects related to alchemy, and as a result, many keywords related to this topic appear in the dialogue layer, such as: "alchemy," 'transmutation,' "equivalent exchange," 'philosopher's stone,' 'steel alchemist' or 'homunculus.' There is practically no narrator in the comics - the exceptions are volumes 1, 3, and 27.

The narration is impersonal; in volume 1, he begins a phrase, and in volume 27, he finishes it; in volume 3, he describes the nature of the philosopher's stone. The characters' landscapes and appearance are not described, as illustrations show this. In the story, there are mainly dialogues and monologues, which do not end with periods but exclamation points, question marks, polys or nothing. The characters use colloquial language, but formal phrases appear when the situation demands it, such as during conversations with high-ranking military officials or when the character requires it. There are a lot of interrupted sentences, which adds dynamics to the dialogue. Because of the comic character, there are many sound-alike words like "boom," "shzzzz," and "crunch," and their purpose is to show what is happening around them and add dynamics to the scenes. Edward Elric uses colloquial language, rarely using formal words, sometimes addressing military people by rank, an example being Riza Hawkeye, to

whom he refers as "Lieutenant." He is often referred to as a "shortie" because he is relatively short for his age. Being referred to as short, Edward gets angry, which he expresses through cursing and many exclamations. Ed's dialogues often contain insulting words, such as "mongrel," "muzzle," "you bastard" or other such phrases. He usually addresses his brother as "Al" or "Alphonse." Over the course of the story presented, his type of pronunciation changes somewhat, becoming more mature, but there is still much vulgarity in his lines. Al also uses colloquial language, but slightly different from his older brother. Alphonse uses polite phrases very often. He addresses Edward as "brother," "Ed" or "Edziu." It can be noted that Al notoriously apologizes to Ed and explains his behavior, and outbursts of anger. Through this type of treatment, some characters think that it is Alphonse who acts like an older brother.

Figure 3:

Examples of comic pages showing the text in Arakawa's work;

The authors' materials - images from the 14th volume of the "Fullmetal Alchemist"



The antagonists in the manga definitely and clearly, in their dialogues, inform us about their contempt for people. In volume two, when the action moves to the city of Liore, a homunculus named Lust makes statements about humans: “Look Gluttony! How bottomlessly stupid people can be!” (Arakawa, 2006, vol. 2, pp. 65). In volume fourteen, during a meeting with the Elric brothers and their friend Lin Yao, the Father of Homunculus compares humanity to worms “Do you people, seeing a worm crawling on the ground, think of it as ‘stupid’? Even if it litters about, fighting for life, the difference between you is so great that you simply don’t care. That’s what you are to me – worms” (Arakawa, 2009, vol. 14, p. 18). Homunculuses refer to characters such as Edward, Alphonse, Izumi, Roy, Hohenheim as ‘sacrifices.’ This is to emphasize their importance to the father’s plan and not, as it may seem, a negative form.

The author tried to show the character of the characters through their style of pronunciation. An example is Alex Louis Armstrong, who stands out through the use of archaisms and sometimes in punctuated chic. Volume two features a chimaera who spoke in a human voice. Her utterances were divided into syllables, resulting in pauses when reading her statements. Pages 131 and 132 of the second volume show a text that can be interpreted as the narrator telling the story of the Ishvar war, but the subsequent text box clearly indicates that Roy Mustang pronounces the text - he is distinguished from the narrator of the first and last volumes by his font, which is sans-serif, unlike the narrator. The author often deviates slightly from the main plot, that is, the Elric brothers’ search for a way to recover their bodies. These treatments are meant to better acquaint the reader with the world of alchemy created in “Fullmetal Alchemist” and its characters.

Visual analysis:

The author uses a style typical of manga - the characters have large eyes, expressive facial expressions, and a moderately realistic depiction of the figures; however, there are elements depicted in a realistic manner, such as the landscape, buildings, clothing, etc. There are no visible pen pulls, so Arakawa definitely uses

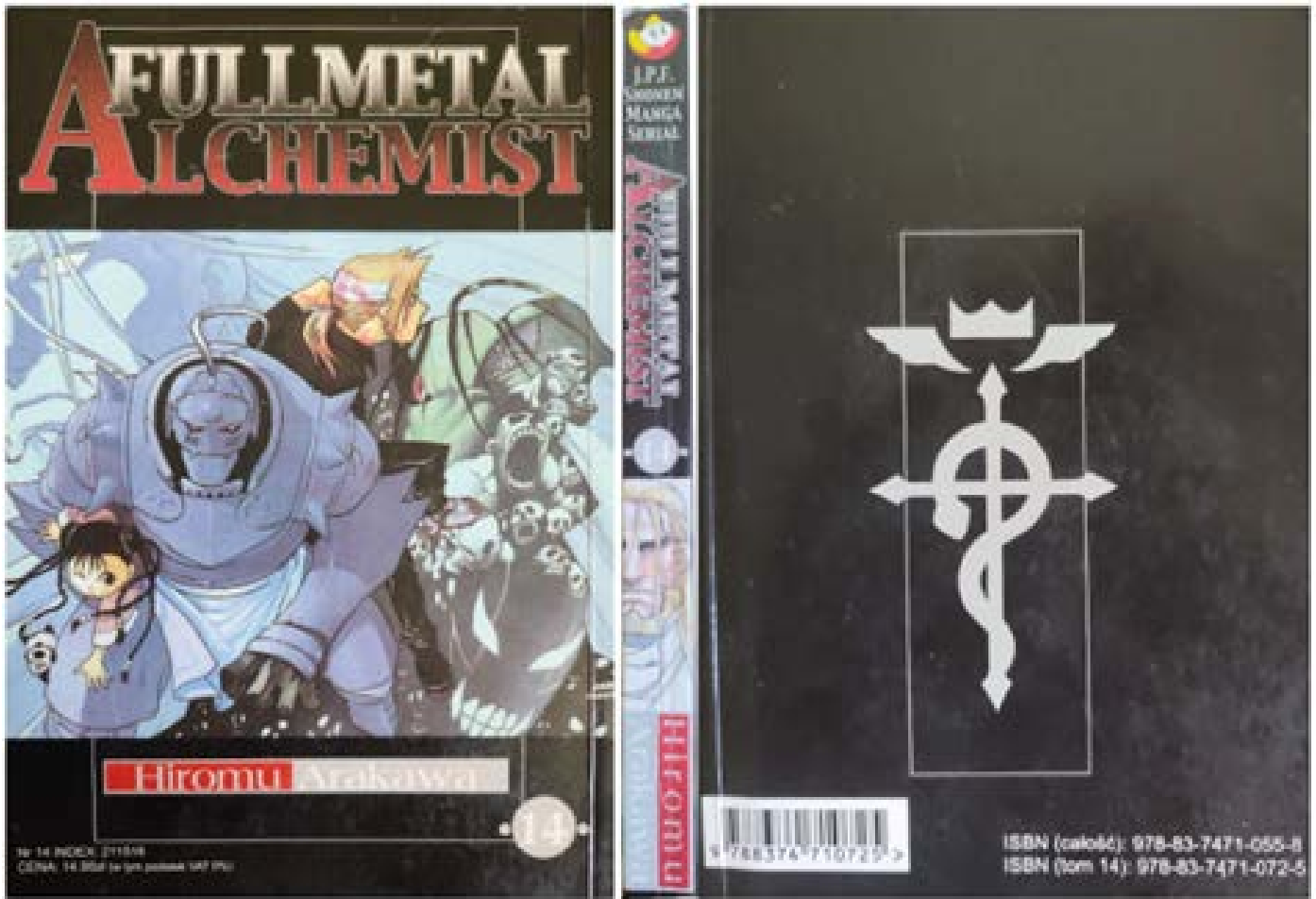
single strokes to paint. A great number of frames have lots of details, especially clothing, background objects, weapons or armor. Most of the characters have their own special features, such as Ed’s braid and prosthetics, Al’s horn on his armor, Envy’s tattoo of an uroboros on his left thigh, Gluttony’s tattoo of an uroboros on his tongue, Scar’s “X” shaped scar on his forehead; these elements make the characters recognizable at a glance. The author is not afraid to draw a variety of silhouettes, so she does not limit herself to one type of figure for men and women. One can see people with disabilities, young people, older adults, fat people, skinny people, beautiful people, ugly people or even average people. However, men prevail when considering the number of male and female main characters.

The main female characters are courageous, brave, confident, have a firm outlook and can inspire fear in males. The main characters are mostly portrayed as attractive people. An interesting trick the author uses is the sudden transition from a serious scene into a comedic one - this is evident in the sudden simplification of the drawing style—landscapes, whether a simple rural scenery or a city centre, are drawn in detail. Sometimes, the backgrounds in the frames are heavily reduced to just one or two elements to better draw attention to a character or another object or to mere lines to show movement.

The color scheme in “Fullmetal Alchemist” is not overly complicated, as the comic’s interior is shown in black and white, and the shadows are done with applied dots (called rasters). Other colors appear only on the front of the covers; the rest of the cover has a black background, on which on the front, in addition to the drawing, is also the title and author, and on the back is a white flamel cross. The manga was published in softcover. The color shades on the covering image are reminiscent of watercolor paintings in that they are not heavily saturated; they are even pastel and transition well into other colors. In most cases, the title image is placed in a dynamic composition. The publisher’s logo is placed at the top of the side panel. Of course, on the cover, there is information such as the volume number, index, price, barcode, and ISBN number.

Figure 4:

*The cover of volume 14 as an example of the color scheme;
The authors' materials - a cover of volume 14 "Fullmetal Alchemist"*



The frames are both open, closed and semi-open. They have different sizes and shapes. Sometimes, the author partially overlaps the frames, but enough so they are still fully readable. Dialogue bubbles are not perfectly rounded; they can even be approached as angular figures. The shapes are variable depending on the text being spoken; if a character is shouting, the balloon is sharply pointed, and the size of the balloon also changes depending on the volume of the spoken issue. In the case of thinking, there are two appearance options: a classic cloud with circles towards the thinking person and a circle surrounded by dashes. The author often gives bubbles a different shape and additional features when necessary, but the reader is able to quickly recognize what a given bubble is supposed to be, such as a conversation with someone on the phone, because it is shown by manoeuvring the frames. An example of talking on the phone and changing speech bubbles can be found in volume 14 when Edward talks to Winry. The person's dialogue

on the handset's other side has a double line. The font used by the publisher for dialogues is sans-serif and written in majuscules, making it difficult to read long speeches fluently and to recognize words that should begin with a capital letter. However, this is not the only typeface used, as those coming from Xing have a somewhat ornate typeface in their dialogues, still sans-serif, but the letter dashes taper off on one side. This treatment emphasizes that these characters speak with a certain accent. The same was done for the Chimaera speaking in a human voice from volume 2. Here, too, the purpose was to show the otherness of the pronunciation style. The cover and the table of contents also use a different typeface, which is a serif font. With onomatopoeia, the typefaces are often fitted into the scenery with their style or are toned down not to disturb it. From time to time, these words can appear in balloons, like dialogue, which draws attention to that particular sound.

Figure 5:

Summary of dialogue balloons from volumes 2, 14 and 26;

The authors' materials - images from the 2nd, 14th and 26th volumes of the "Fullmetal Alchemist"



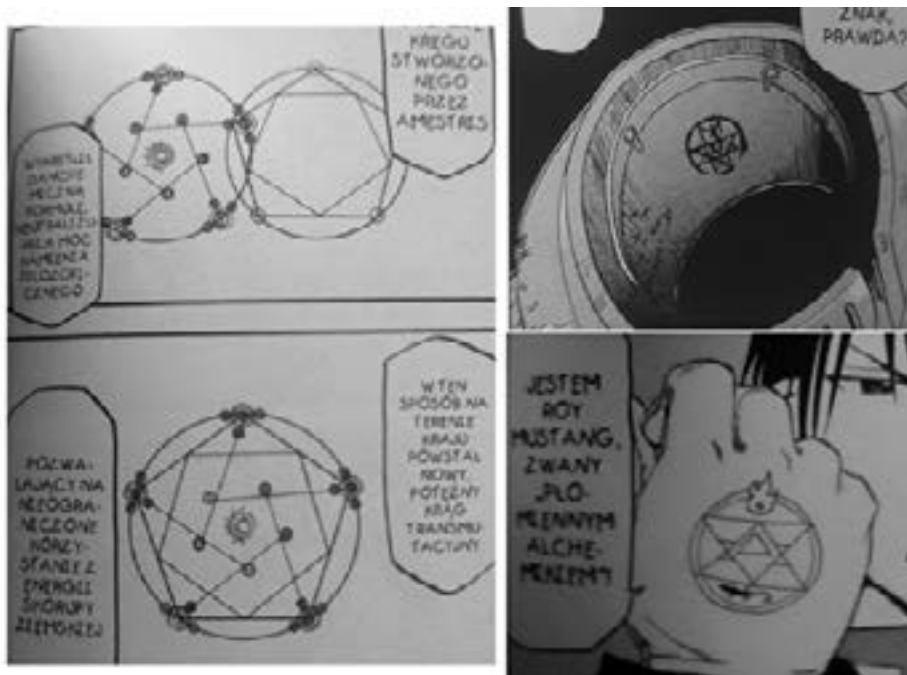
The manga contains recurring symbols such as the flame's cross, uroboros and transmutation circles. Each has its own meaning, the first two have a specific definition, but each transmutation circle can look different. The flame's cross is a symbol that appears on the back covers and is often worn by Ed, Al and their teacher, Izumi. The symbol is not explained in the comic, but it comes from a medieval French alchemist, Nikolas Flamel, who is said to have created the Philosopher's Stone (Paryz, [n.d.](#)). The stone is crucial to the plot of this manga, as the brothers want to obtain it in order to regain their bodies. Uroboros appears in the form of a tattoo on the bodies of the homunculus. The symbol is defined in Volume 10 in a short FAQ from the translator. It appears to be a snake that eats itself and is meant to symbolize the transformations taking place in alchemy and the philosopher's stone. Uroboros fit very well with the concept of homunculus in the

manga, as they can regenerate extremely fast, and their core is this philosopher's stone. Many types of transmutation circles are shown in "Fullmetal Alchemist"; each has a different functionality, such as the circle for transmutation of the philosopher's stone or the human. The circle in each is meant to signify the cyclic flow of energy, while the symbols inside are so-called alchemical runes, which vary depending on what the alchemist wants to create by releasing energy. It can be seen that they are often geometric figures, such as triangles or other polygons. Some alchemists have circles placed on clothing, weapons or even skin. Alphonse Elric has a transmutation circle inside his armour collar, which Edward placed there. The symbol is created when Ed decides to summon Al's soul after his mother's transmutation fails. The younger brother's soul would leave the metal armour if the mark were disturbed.

Figure 6:

Example of showing transmutation circles;

The authors' materials - images from the 2nd, 3rd and 26th volumes of the "Fullmetal Alchemist"



The author definitely knows what she is doing to create a comic to which a significant audience will become attached. This is due to the perfectly matched dialogues to the drawings and facial expressions of the characters - when the reader sees a character and dialogue bubbles, he can almost perfectly imagine how the character would sound. Arakawa uses different silhouettes and appearance elements so that each character has its own character. This makes it easy for the reader to choose a protagonist who will be his favorite so that he can identify with him.

Nine years have passed between the first and last volumes of the manga. During this time, the comic's author's drawing style has changed somewhat improved. This can be seen through changes in line strokes, better balance of lines and more attention to detail. After looking at the abovementioned volumes, one can see the progression of the author's drawing already from the covers. The colors used on the cover of volume 27 are paler and less saturated. Arakawa placed exactly the same characters in both volumes, but Ed plays the main role in the last one. In both cases, the composition is dynamic. The cover of the last volume, despite Ed's wounds, is more positive due to the use of lighter color tones and the fact that Edward is smiling. In the first volume, the older brother has a visibly negative face, even upset. It is easy to see that the main characters have changed not only through the author's progression but also because of growing up. In the first volume, it can be

seen that Ed is a child, and in the last volume, he is already a grown man. Looking at him, it is noticeable that his clothing and hairstyle resemble his father, Hohenheim, in the final pages. He no longer has his hair braided but simply has it tied in a ponytail. He has also started wearing more elegant clothes. In the case of Al in armour, the passage of years is not too visible; the only elements that might indicate the flow of time are the scratches in the metal. However, in both volumes, Alphonse is also shown in his human form, and it is through this that his growing up can be seen. The drawing style in "Fullmetal Alchemist" has become bolder, which can be seen through the variety of line thicknesses. The first volume was delicate, even tentative, and not necessarily well balanced, while the latest volume matched the action. The author has also managed to improve her skills as to human proportions. This is evident through the style of the hands drawn, the detail of the elements and the facial expressions of the characters.

Hiromu Arakawa has definitely started to add more detail to the frames, whether in the characters, landscapes, buildings or fight scenes. In addition, the fight scenes have been lengthened. In the first volume they last about two pages, followed by a break in the action. In volume twenty-seven, the fight scenes are spread over more pages, and the action can move from fight to fight, not necessarily with an interlude of quiet scenes.

Figure 7:

Comparison of volume 27 with volume 1 of the manga;

The authors' materials - images from the 27th and 1st volumes of the "Fullmetal Alchemist"

**CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, from the stylistic and visual analysis carried out above, it can be deduced that the author of the manga perfectly knows how to match the text with the drawn frames and facial expressions of the characters. The procedures used by Arakawa integrate the text and image and complement each other. Each created character has a different character, which is presented both by the language they speak and by elements of their appearance. The dialogues presented are not composed in a dull or monotonous way but are tailored to specific actions, and have a fixed bluntness of enunciation, conditioned by punctuation marks. Comparing the first and last volumes makes it evident how Hiromu Arakawa's drawing style has developed.

Currently, the series, published between 2006 and 2012, is becoming unavailable due to its going out of print, caused by the release of the "Delux" version. This edition is printed in a larger format with different covers, more pages per volume and additional color pages. Due to this action on the part of publisher J.P. Fantastica, it will be possible to expand the study of the "Fullmetal Alchemist" series when all the collector's volumes appear.

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The Role of Instagram in Building Journalist's Personal Brand: An Analysis of Communication Strategies in Social Media

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Instagram, journalist, social media, communication, personal brand

ABSTRACT

Instagram has become one of the most important tools for building a personal brand, especially for journalists. The aim of this article is to examine the role of this platform in shaping the image of journalists and to analyze the communication strategies they use to leverage social media effectively. The paper discusses how journalists build their professional identity, engage audiences, and promote values and content through Instagram. The study covers both the visual and textual aspects of posts and interactions with followers, which are a key element in building the authenticity of a personal brand. The article highlights how Instagram enables journalists to stand out from the competition and influences their work's perceived credibility and professionalism.

Introduction

In the age of digital media and the growing popularity of social media platforms, Instagram has become a key tool in building a personal brand, not only for celebrities or influencers but also for professionals, including journalists. With its visual capabilities and interactive features, Instagram offers journalists a platform to shape their image, connect with their audience, and promote their work. Unlike traditional media, social media allows for direct and more personal interaction with audiences, which can influence trust and viewer loyalty.

The aim of this article is to analyze the role of Instagram in building journalists' personal brands, with particular emphasis on the communication strategies they employ on this platform. The study will examine how journalists use Instagram to create their professional identity, what communication techniques they use in their interactions with audiences, and what challenges and opportunities social media presence presents in the context of journalistic work. The article will attempt to answer two research questions: How do journalists use Instagram to build their personal brand? What communication strategies are employed? The paper will analyze both communication practices and the potential impact of these actions on building relationships with audiences and trust in the information being conveyed.

The personal brand of journalists

A personal brand is everything that others say about us when we're not in the room.

- Jeff Bezos.

There are various definitions of the concept of a

brand. J. Altkorn, in *Brand Strategy*, emphasizes its multidimensional character. A brand can be understood as a product designation, a trademark, the company's image in the eyes of the consumer, or as a tool for communicating benefits that are important to the customer (Altkorn, 1999).

Personal branding in the profession of journalism is a collection of traits, values, and images that define a professional in the eyes of the audience. It is the process of consciously creating and managing one's reputation, including professional and personal actions. It plays a key role in journalism, allowing one to stand out in the competitive media market, build audience trust and loyalty, and increase public influence. A contemporary journalist with a strong personal brand becomes an expert and a media personality whose opinions and actions significantly impact public opinion (Chimkowska, 2022).

Traditional methods of building a journalist's reputation, such as publications in reputable newspapers, books, or appearances on television, were primarily based on recognition within the professional community and media institutions. However, new media, including social media, offer journalists direct contact with their audience, allowing them to create their image and respond quickly to events independently. Platforms such as Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn enable personal brand building, community engagement, and direct interaction with the public, which was much more limited in traditional media.

The profession of journalism in contemporary times

The Great Dictionary of the Polish Language [Wielki

słownik języka polskiego] defines the word profession as a set of tasks and activities performed by a person to earn a living, requiring specific knowledge and skills that are acquired through education, training, and practical exercises. A journalist can take on various roles depending on the context – from a reporter covering events on-site to an editor crafting content to a commentator or columnist interpreting events in a broader social, political, or cultural context.

In the dynamic world of contemporary media, the definition of journalism constantly evolves, reflecting technological, social, and cultural changes. Today, it encompasses both traditional forms of journalism as well as new areas, such as citizen journalism, data journalism, and multimedia storytelling (Brodzińska, 2015).

Instagram is one of the most popular social media platforms, primarily based on visual communication, allowing users to post photos, videos, and stories. Instagram's algorithms promote content that generates high engagement, such as likes, comments, and shares, making it crucial for journalists to tailor their posts to the expectations of their audience. The platform offers various formats, such as posts, reels, and stories, allowing diverse content presentation – from short, dynamic videos to long-form posts (Frier, 2020).

The specificity of visual communication on Instagram is of great importance for journalists, as it enables the quick and effective transmission of information. Visual elements, such as photos, graphics, and infographics, make it easier to reach a wide audience, especially in an era of increasing visual content consumption. Instagram allows journalists to interact directly with their audience,

which is crucial for building a personal brand and maintaining an engaged community (Stopczyńska, 2021).

Social media, including Instagram, have become integral to journalism, offering journalists new opportunities to reach their audience and respond to current events. However, using this platform comes with challenges, such as the polarization of opinions, the increasing number of fake news, and the pressure to maintain a positive image. Journalists must face the responsibility of ensuring the accuracy of the information they convey while balancing the demands of algorithms with the expectations of their audience (Żukowski, 2024).

Research methodology

The research methodology presented in this article is based on content analysis, aiming to examine the role of Instagram in the process of personal branding among journalists. Particular attention is paid to how this platform is utilized for self-promotion and interaction with audiences. The analysis focuses on content published on Instagram, such as posts and photographs, to reveal communication strategies and tools employed by journalists in shaping their public image.

The scope of the study encompasses journalists who actively use Instagram for self-promotion and professional purposes, representing a wide range of journalistic genres. The selection criteria include journalists engaged in various fields and with significant reach, such as Martyna Wojciechowska, Tomasz Kammel and Grażyna Plebanek.

Figure 1:

An Instagram post by Martyna Wojciechowska portrays the journalist promoting the free preventive program Młode Głowy (Young Minds).



Martyna Wojciechowska is a Polish TV presenter, journalist, traveller, writer, and social activist. She has received numerous awards for her reporting and journalism and gained widespread popularity as the host of the *Woman at the Edge of the World* program. Wojciechowska is active on Instagram, where 2.2 million people follow her account. She has published 4,812 posts, with content primarily focusing on lifestyle, travel, culture, and social issues such as gender equality and tolerance. Wojciechowska builds her personal brand on Instagram by emphasizing her views on social topics like gender equality and tolerance. Her authenticity and directness attract a loyal following. She shares content related to literature, culture, and inspiring quotes while engaging with her followers' comments.

Figure 2:

*An Instagram post by Martyna Wojciechowska portrays the journalist promoting the free preventive program *Młode Głowy* (Young Minds).*



Tomasz Kammel is known as an experienced TV presenter, journalist, and master of ceremonies. On his social media, he expands his activities to include educational content, primarily focused on communication, self-presentation, and public speaking. His Instagram profile boasts 360,000 followers. The presenter runs an educational series called *Kammel Czanel* on YouTube, where he explains communication principles and demonstrates practical techniques, such as overcoming stage fright, in an accessible and humorous way.

On Instagram, he shares stories and posts in which he answers viewers' questions and provides glimpses into his daily work on television and during workshops. This allows him to maintain regular contact with his fans and audience. On social media, he posts motivational content emphasizing the importance of personal development, supports his

An example of her social involvement is her promoting reading and support for social initiatives, such as the march against violence titled *Her Name Was Liza #StopRape* and the *Unaweza* Foundation, which aids individuals experiencing mental health crises. An Instagram post by Martyna Wojciechowska portrays the journalist promoting the free preventive program *Młode Głowy* (Young Minds). The post highlights Wojciechowska's engagement in social initiatives, showcasing her role as a public figure advocating for critical societal issues, thereby reinforcing her personal brand as socially responsible and committed to community well-being (Instagram profile of Martyna Wojciechowska).

followers, and encourages them to take action and share their successes. In the post, Tomasz Kammel is shown conducting a training session titled *3 Reasons Why People Want to Listen*. Such posts reinforce his personal brand on Instagram by showcasing his expertise in communication and public speaking. By sharing educational and practical content, Kammel positions himself as a knowledgeable and credible professional, engaging his audience and building trust through valuable insights.

Tomasz Kammel builds his brand on Instagram by regularly sharing knowledge and experience gained as a presenter and communication coach. Kammel strengthens his image as an expert in these areas by posting content related to topics discussed in his YouTube videos, such as effective communication and self-presentation. Additionally, by engaging with his followers, responding to their questions, and

reacting to comments, he establishes direct contact with his audience. This approach helps him build a loyal community and brings him closer to his

fans, who feel appreciated and involved in his work (Instagram profile of Tomasz Kammel).

Figure 3:

In the shared photo, the journalist is promoting an international literary meeting about women whose paths lead through Brussels.



Grażyna Plebanek is a renowned Polish writer and columnist primarily associated with the magazine *Wysokie Obcasy Extra*. In her articles and books, she addresses critical social issues such as feminism, cultural identity, and contemporary gender roles—her books, including *Girls from Portofino*, *Mrs. Fury*, and *Brussels. The Animality of the City*, combine literary fiction with an analysis of the modern world. On Instagram, the author shares reflections on daily life and her writing process and recommends books, films, and cultural events.

Grażyna Plebanek uses the Instagram platform to promote her values, creativity, and interactions with her audience. Her strategy is based on authenticity, education, and an aesthetic message that attracts engaged followers. For example, she posts photos featuring excerpts from her books, quotes from her novels, and inspiring reflections on literature. She responds to comments from her followers, participates in discussions, and engages in various forums focused on topics such as femininity, feminism, and social issues.

Through such posts, Grażyna Plebanek builds her brand by connecting literature with important social issues. By engaging in cultural events and promoting initiatives aligning with her values, she strengthens her image associated with literature, feminism, and equality. The journalist actively participates in discussions about the role of women in society, which helps her attract people with similar interests and values. Such content increases her visibility and builds trust and loyalty among her audience

(Instagram profile of Grażyna Plebanek).

Analysis of the role of Instagram in building journalists' brand

According to a report by Gemius, Instagram is used by 15.1 million active users in Poland. Instagram has become one of the key tools for self-promotion in the 21st century, especially among media professionals such as journalists. This visual platform enables quick access to a wide audience, offering professional and personal content presentation opportunities. Due to the ease of content creation and diverse communication formats, Instagram fosters the building and strengthening a personal brand. Journalists use it not only to publish the results of their work but also to create an image of an authentic and engaged individual ¹.

When building their presence on Instagram, journalists often focus on publishing content related to their work. Posts about current events, reports, interviews, or analyses of political situations are intended to showcase them as experts in their field. Sharing behind-the-scenes material, such as work photos, preparation for interviews, or professional meetings, allows them to show the creative process and build a sense of closeness with their audience. These types of posts not only inform but also strengthen the image of a professional, which is crucial in the context of a journalist's work (Roguski, 2020).

However, creating an image of authenticity is an equally important aspect of building a personal brand. Social media audiences expect the people they

1. Raport Gemius, retrieved from <https://gemius.com/pl/news/druga-edycja-raportu-social-media-juz-dostepna/>

to present themselves not only in a professional context but also on a personal level. Journalists who share personal aspects of their lives, such as photos with family, hobbies, or everyday situations, become more accessible and closer to their audience. Such posts can build a bond based on trust, which is the foundation of a strong personal brand. Interactions with the audience – responding to comments, private messages, and organizing Q&A sessions – allow journalists to connect with their fans, fostering a sense of community and authenticity (Niedźwiedziński, 2016).

Engaging the community is an essential element of effective communication on Instagram. Journalists who regularly engage with their audience increase the engagement and reach of their content. Using tools like polls, comments, quizzes, or questions allows for direct interaction with the audience, boosting their engagement and providing valuable feedback that can be useful in future content production. Additionally, such actions can help maintain audience loyalty, as followers feel acknowledged and appreciated by their favorite journalists (Popiołek, 2015).

Personalizing content is another crucial element in building a personal brand. Journalists who tailor their posts to the expectations and needs of their community gain greater trust and loyalty from their audience. Responding to individual comments and posting content that references previous conversations or fan inquiries helps create a more intimate and personal relationship. These actions promote the development of a long-term bond with the audience, which is essential for maintaining a strong and stable personal brand.

Instagram also serves as an important tool in managing reputation crises. The speed and reach of the platform mean that any controversy or criticism can quickly gain widespread attention, and how a journalist responds to such situations is crucial for maintaining a positive image. Journalists who know how to properly address criticism demonstrate transparency and responsibility, which helps minimize the negative effects of a crisis. In controversial situations, responses should be thoughtful, substantive, and unemotional, allowing the journalist to maintain professionalism and credibility (Roguski, 2020).

Transparency in communication on Instagram is crucial, especially in crisis situations. Audiences expect journalists to be honest, reliable, and responsible. Journalists who are transparent in their posts and interactions build trust within their community. In the case of reputation crises,

transparency in communication, quick responses, and a willingness to clarify the situation is key to rebuilding reputation. These attitudes allow journalists to maintain authenticity and credibility, which are the foundation of their success on social media platforms (Stawarz, 2017).

With its visual format and ability to interact with the audience, Instagram has become one of the most important tools in building journalists' personal brands. It allows for professional content presentation and creates an image of an authentic, accessible, and engaged individual. Engaging the community, personalizing content, and responsibly managing reputation crises are key elements of effectively using this platform in the context of journalistic work (Skwarek, 2023).

Challenges and limitations of using Instagram by journalists

Using Instagram by journalists comes with several challenges and limitations that can impact their professionalism and image. One of the main issues is finding the right balance between professionalism and privacy. Instagram, as a social media platform, encourages the sharing of both professional and personal content. Journalists who engage on this platform must consider how much of their private life they are comfortable sharing with their audience. On the one hand, showcasing personal aspects can increase authenticity and community engagement, but on the other hand, it may lead to breaches of privacy, which, in the long run, could affect the journalist's image and professionalism.

This issue is also linked to the risk of crossing the boundaries of intimacy. Posting overly personal content, such as details about family life, emotional experiences, or controversial opinions, can spark controversy and lead to a loss of trust among the audience. Journalists who overly engage with their privacy on Instagram may be accused of excessively exposing their personal lives, which could undermine their authority in the eyes of the public. In such cases, it becomes difficult to maintain a balanced boundary between what is acceptable regarding self-promotion and what might be perceived as crossing the line of privacy.

Journalists also face ethical dilemmas related to self-promotion. Social media platforms like Instagram place professionals under constant pressure to promote themselves, which can conflict with the principles of objectivity and journalistic integrity. In their pursuit of increasing reach and popularity,

journalists may feel the pressure to create more engaging but less substantive content, which can lead to manipulation or misinformation. These difficulties related to self-promotion are particularly problematic in journalism, where the primary responsibility is to deliver reliable and credible information .

Another significant issue is the pressure created by algorithms and metrics, which determine which content gets promoted and which gets pushed to the margins. Like any social media platform, Instagram operates based on algorithms that favor content with high engagement, meaning posts that generate many likes, comments, and shares. In an effort to maintain high visibility and reach, journalists may feel pressured to tailor their content to meet the algorithm's expectations, which may not always align with their editorial intentions. Pursuing a large number of followers and reach can lead to superficial content that does not necessarily address the audience's informational needs .

This also comes with the risk of the negative impact of comparison with other users. In the world of social media, where everyone has access to information about follower counts, likes, and reach, journalists may feel pressure to compare their success with the achievements of others, which can lead to feelings of inadequacy or frustration. Such comparisons can discourage creativity, cause stress, and affect how journalists present their content, as they may focus more on aligning with prevailing trends rather than concentrating on the substantive value of their posts (Ciamciara, [2010](#)).

The issue of disinformation is a significant concern on Instagram. With the rising number of fake news, journalists must be particularly cautious when sharing visual content that can be easily manipulated or taken out of context. Photos and videos on Instagram can be used to spread disinformation, and editing or manipulating them has become increasingly common. Journalists must be aware of these risks and make every effort to avoid falling into the traps of disinformation. It is essential to verify the sources of content before publishing and ensure that the information is accurate and fact-based. Otherwise, there is a risk that the journalist could unknowingly participate in disseminating fake news, which would undermine their credibility .

The challenges journalists face when using Instagram are complex and require a mindful approach to privacy, ethics, and responsibility for shared content. In the face of growing competition for audience attention and pressure from algorithms, journalists must balance self-promotion with

maintaining accuracy and professionalism. It is important to avoid the pitfalls of disinformation and comparisons with other users while striving to maintain authenticity and responsibility in communication on the platform.

Conclusions

Instagram plays a significant role in building journalists' brands, offering them a platform to publish professional and personal content. With its visual format and interactive features such as stories, comments, and polls, it not only allows for showcasing effective journalistic work but also for building authentic relationships with the audience. The platform helps increase reach, engage the community, and shape the image of the journalist as an accessible and open individual. A key strategy is using Instagram to present oneself as a professional while maintaining authenticity and engaging in interactions with followers, which allows for building a loyal and engaged community.

Journalists should implement several proven strategies and best practices to effectively use Instagram in the context of building a personal brand. First, regularly publishing work-related content, such as behind-the-scenes material or analyses of current events, is important, as it helps build credibility. Second, authenticity and transparency in interactions with the audience are essential for maintaining a positive image. Journalists who share their professional achievements and personal moments create a bond based on trust and closeness. Interactions with the audience, such as responding to comments, organizing Q&A sessions, or engaging in discussions, help create a dynamic community that contributes to further developing a personal brand.

From an ethical perspective, journalists should ensure a balance between self-promotion and responsibility for their content. The need to engage the audience and tailor content to the expectations of algorithms should not lead to neglecting professionalism or substance. Ethical use of Instagram also involves a responsible approach to disinformation – journalists should avoid spreading unverified information and always seek to verify sources before publishing any content.

Recommendations for journalists are also concerned with maintaining a proper balance between professionalism and privacy. While sharing personal moments can help build authenticity, it is important to avoid excessive disclosure of information that could harm both private life and professional reputation.

It is crucial to understand the boundaries between these two spheres and consciously manage the content being published. In terms of future research, it is worth focusing on analyzing other social media platforms, such as TikTok or Twitter, which are gaining importance in journalists' communication strategies.

Studying the differences in approaches to self-promotion on these platforms could provide valuable insights into adapting strategies depending on the medium's specifics. An interesting area of study is also comparing the strategies of journalists from different countries, which may vary depending on local cultural, political, or media conditions. Such analyses would allow for a better understanding of global trends in personal brand building among journalists and the application of best practices in various contexts.

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Digital Dialogues: Analyzing the Impact of Social Media on the Effectiveness of Public Health Campaigns

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social media, public health campaigns, misinformation, health belief model, community engagement, behavioral influence.

ABSTRACT

In the digital age, social media has emerged as a pivotal tool in public health communication, reshaping the landscape of outreach and engagement. This paper investigates the transformative influence of social media platforms on health communication strategies, confronting both opportunities and challenges inherent in this paradigm shift. The study assesses the effectiveness of social media in public health campaigns, scrutinizing its utilization, impact on diverse populations, and the persistent hurdles of misinformation and digital literacy gaps. Employing qualitative content analysis, this research scrutinizes selected public health campaigns from renowned organizations like the CDC, WHO, and UNICEF, spanning from January 2021 to December 2022. Through thematic coding, the study uncovers nuanced insights into engagement dynamics, sentiment distributions, and the prevalence of misinformation across various social media platforms. Key findings underscore the multifaceted nature of social media's impact, revealing differential engagement patterns, sentiment dynamics, and misinformation challenges. Notably, campaigns leveraging visually engaging formats and fostering community engagement exhibited higher efficacy in driving behavior change. Trust emerged as a cornerstone of effective communication, emphasizing the importance of credibility and transparency in campaign messaging. Moving forward, this research advocates for tailored strategies to combat misinformation, optimize content visibility, and evaluate the enduring impact of social media-driven public health campaigns on health behaviors. By addressing these imperatives, stakeholders can harness the full potential of social media to advance public health agendas and foster informed societies.

Introduction

In the digital age, the landscape of health communication has been dramatically transformed by the advent and proliferation of social media platforms. Traditionally, public health campaigns relied heavily on print media, television, and radio to disseminate health information to the public. However, the rise of social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and YouTube has introduced new dynamics, enabling real-time information sharing and direct interaction between public health entities and the public (Moorhead et al., 2013). These platforms offer unique opportunities for public health campaigns to reach larger and more diverse audiences rapidly and interactively.

Social media's pervasive nature makes it a powerful tool for public health communication. It facilitates the dissemination of health messages to a global audience, provides a platform for public engagement, and enables the quick mobilization of resources and support during health emergencies (Merchant & Lurie, 2020). For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, social media was pivotal in spreading information about preventive measures, vaccination campaigns, and health guidelines (Basch et al., 2020). This shift towards digital communication necessitates a critical analysis of the effectiveness of

social media in enhancing public health campaigns.

Despite its advantages, the use of social media in public health communication is not without challenges. One significant issue is the spread of misinformation and disinformation, which can undermine public trust and hinder health campaigns' effectiveness (Kouzy et al., 2020). Furthermore, the varying levels of digital literacy among different population groups can affect how health messages are received and interpreted (Park et al., 2016). On the other hand, social media offers unprecedented opportunities for personalized health communication, targeted interventions, and community engagement, which can enhance the relevance and impact of public health campaigns (Heldman et al., 2013).

Understanding the impact of social media on public health campaigns is crucial for developing effective communication strategies in the digital era. This study contributes to the growing body of literature on digital health communication by providing insights into how social media can be optimized to support public health initiatives. By identifying both the strengths and limitations of social media as a communication tool, this research can inform the design of more effective public health campaigns that harness the potential of digital platforms while mitigating their drawbacks.

As social media continues to evolve and become an integral part of daily life, its role in public health communication will likely expand. By critically analyzing the impact of social media on public health campaigns, this study aims to provide valuable insights that can enhance the effectiveness of health communication strategies. Ultimately, the goal is to leverage the potential of digital platforms to improve public health outcomes and foster a more informed and health-conscious society.

Literature Review

The proliferation of social media has transformed the landscape of public health communication, providing both opportunities and challenges. This literature review examines social media's impact on public health campaigns' effectiveness, focusing on how these platforms can enhance public health messaging, engage diverse populations, and combat misinformation. Key studies highlight the dual role of social media as both a facilitator and a potential barrier to effective public health communication.

Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and TikTok have become vital tools for disseminating health information. These platforms enable public health agencies to reach large audiences rapidly and engage with the public in real-time. Studies show that social media campaigns can significantly increase awareness and influence health behaviors. For example, a study by Moorhead et al. (2013) found that social media facilitates interactive health communication, which can improve public engagement and health outcomes. Moreover, social media allows for targeted communication, enabling public health officials to tailor messages to specific demographics. The use of hashtags, influencers, and targeted advertising has been shown to enhance the reach and impact of health campaigns. According to Heldman et al. (2013), social media campaigns that utilize these strategies can achieve higher engagement and message retention levels.

Recent research has further demonstrated the power of social media in shaping health outcomes during the COVID-19 pandemic. Zhang et al. (2021) found that social media played a crucial role in raising awareness and promoting preventive behaviors during the pandemic, particularly through platforms like WeChat and WhatsApp, which allowed for the rapid dissemination of information. Social media's real-time communication also enabled governments and health organizations to combat misinformation and share updates about health guidelines. Additionally, Lwin et al. (2020) highlighted how social media

campaigns, such as those by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), significantly contributed to increasing public compliance with safety measures during the pandemic.

Several successful public health campaigns illustrate the potential of social media to influence health behaviors. The “#ThisIsOurShot” campaign, aimed at promoting COVID-19 vaccination among healthcare workers, leveraged social media to create a sense of community and shared purpose. The campaign utilized personal stories, live Q&A sessions, and endorsements from trusted figures to counter vaccine hesitancy (Ferdous, 2023). Similarly, the “Stop the Spread” campaign by the World Health Organization (WHO) used social media to disseminate accurate information about COVID-19 prevention, reaching millions of users worldwide (WHO, 2020). Another notable example is the “Truth” campaign, which aims to reduce youth smoking rates. By employing edgy, youth-oriented content and engaging directly with young people on platforms like Instagram and Snapchat, the campaign successfully decreased smoking rates among teenagers (Farrelly et al., 2017). These examples demonstrate how social media can amplify public health messages and drive behavior change.

Despite its benefits, social media also presents significant challenges for public health communication. One major issue is the spread of misinformation, which can undermine public health efforts. A study by Vosoughi et al. (2018) found that false information spreads more quickly and widely on social media than accurate information. This phenomenon was particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, where misinformation about the virus and vaccines proliferated, creating confusion and scepticism (Cinelli et al., 2020). Furthermore, the algorithmic nature of social media platforms can create echo chambers, where users are exposed primarily to information that reinforces their existing beliefs. This can hinder the effectiveness of public health campaigns by limiting the reach of accurate information to those who most need it (Flaxman et al., 2016). Additionally, issues of digital literacy and access can create disparities in the reach and impact of social media campaigns, particularly among marginalized communities (Sundar, 2020).

Recent studies have continued to underscore these challenges. For instance, Kouzy et al. (2020) highlighted the widespread misinformation during the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic, noting that false claims about treatments and vaccines were shared widely on platforms like Twitter and

This highlights the ongoing struggle of public health agencies to curb misinformation, even with the availability of real-time fact-checking services. Moreover, Bridgman et al. (2021) noted that political polarization, particularly in the U.S., has exacerbated the spread of health-related misinformation on social media, leading to scepticism about official public health guidance.

To maximize the effectiveness of social media in public health campaigns, several strategies have been recommended. Building trust through transparency and engagement is crucial. According to Fernández-Luque and Bau (2015), involving communities in the creation and dissemination of health messages can enhance credibility and acceptance. Additionally, collaborations with influencers and trusted community leaders can help amplify messages and reach sceptical audiences (Hoffman et al., 2020). Another strategy is the use of multimedia content to make health messages more engaging and memorable. Visual content, such as infographics and videos, can effectively convey complex information in an accessible format (Neiger et al., 2013). Furthermore, real-time interaction through live chats and Q&A sessions can address public concerns and provide personalized responses, enhancing the campaign's overall impact (Ferdous, 2023).

Integrating social media into public health campaigns presents significant opportunities and challenges. While social media can enhance the reach and engagement of public health messages, it also requires careful management to address the spread of misinformation and ensure equitable access. By leveraging targeted communication strategies, engaging content, and trusted voices, public health officials can harness the power of social media to improve health outcomes and foster a more informed public.

Theoretical Framework

The increasing integration of social media into daily life has transformed how public health campaigns are designed and disseminated. Social media platforms provide a unique health communication space, offering opportunities and challenges. This theoretical framework explores the impact of social media on the effectiveness of public health campaigns through the lens of the Health Belief Model (HBM) and the Diffusion of Innovations Theory. These theories provide a structured approach to understanding how social media environments perceive and adopt health messages.

Health Belief Model (HBM)

The Health Belief Model, developed by social psychologists Hochbaum, Rosenstock, and Kegels in the 1950s, is a psychological model that explains and predicts health behaviors by focusing on the attitudes and beliefs of individuals (Glanz, Rimer, & Viswanath, 2008). The HBM posits that individuals are more likely to take health-related action if they:

- Perceive Susceptibility: Believe they are at risk of a particular health issue.
- Perceive Severity: Believe that the health issue has serious consequences.
- Perceive Benefits: Believe that taking a specific action would reduce their susceptibility to or severity of the health issue.
- Perceive Barriers: Believe that the costs of taking the action (e.g., time, effort, financial cost) are outweighed by the benefits.
- Cues to Action: Are exposed to factors that prompt action (e.g., media campaigns, advice from others).
- Self-Efficacy: Have confidence in their ability to perform the action (Rosenstock, 1974) successfully.

In the context of social media and public health campaigns, the HBM can be applied to understand how health messages can be tailored to address these constructs effectively. For example, social media campaigns highlighting personal stories and testimonials can enhance perceived susceptibility and severity by making the health issue more relatable and urgent. Additionally, interactive features such as Q&A sessions with health experts can address perceived barriers and enhance self-efficacy by providing direct support and clear information.

Diffusion of Innovations Theory

The Diffusion of Innovations Theory, proposed by Everett Rogers in 1962, explains how, why, and at what rate new ideas and technologies spread through cultures (Rogers, 2003). According to Rogers, the diffusion process involves several key elements:

- Innovation: An idea, practice, or object perceived as new by an individual or other unit of adoption.
- Communication Channels: The means by which information about the innovation is transmitted to members of the social system.
- Time: The duration over which the adoption process occurs.
- Social System: The group of individuals who together adopt the innovation.

The theory categorizes adopters into five groups based on their readiness to adopt an innovation:

innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. For social media-based public health campaigns, understanding these categories can help in designing targeted interventions that cater to different segments of the population. Social media platforms serve as powerful communication channels that facilitate the rapid dissemination of health information. By leveraging influencers and opinion leaders (who often fall into the ‘innovators’ and ‘early adopters’ categories), public health campaigns can accelerate the diffusion process. These influencers can act as change agents, promoting health behaviors and encouraging their followers to adopt new practices. Moreover, the interactive nature of social media allows for real-time feedback and engagement, which can further enhance the diffusion of health innovations.

Integrating HBM and Diffusion of Innovations Theory

Combining the Health Belief Model and the Diffusion of Innovations Theory provides a comprehensive framework for analyzing the impact of social media on public health campaigns. The HBM helps identify the psychological factors that influence individual health behaviors, while the Diffusion of Innovations Theory provides insights into the social dynamics that affect the spread of health information. For instance, a social media campaign aiming to increase vaccination rates can utilize the HBM to address individual beliefs and perceptions about vaccines. By highlighting the risks of vaccine-preventable diseases (perceived susceptibility and severity), the benefits of vaccination, and addressing common barriers (such as misinformation and access issues), the campaign can influence individual decision-making processes. Concurrently, by identifying and engaging early adopters and influencers within the social media space, the campaign can leverage the principles of the Diffusion of Innovations Theory to foster wider acceptance and adoption of vaccination practices.

The theoretical framework combining the Health Belief Model and the Diffusion of Innovations Theory offers valuable insights into the design and implementation of effective social media-based public health campaigns. By addressing both individual psychological factors and broader social dynamics, public health practitioners can enhance the reach and impact of their campaigns. Future research should focus on empirical studies that test the effectiveness of these integrated approaches in various public health contexts.

Materials and Method

This study utilized a qualitative content analysis approach to examine the impact of social media on the effectiveness of public health campaigns. Content analysis is a systematic and objective means of describing and quantifying phenomena, allowing for the analysis of messages conveyed through various media channels (Krippendorff, 2018). By focusing on social media interactions and public responses, this method provided insights into how public health messages are received, interpreted, and acted upon by the online community. We selected a sample of recent public health campaigns that actively employed social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. The campaigns were chosen based on their relevance to pressing public health issues, widespread reach, and high engagement levels on social media. The study included specific campaigns were the CDC’s COVID-19 vaccine promotion, WHO’s anti-smoking initiatives, and UNICEF’s campaigns on childhood immunization.

A purposive sampling strategy was used to select posts and interactions from the official social media accounts of the selected campaigns. Posts were chosen based on their high engagement metrics, including likes, shares, comments, and retweets. This approach ensured that the analysis focused on content with significant public interaction, providing a rich dataset for evaluating the impact of these campaigns. Data were collected from the official social media pages of the CDC, WHO, and UNICEF. We extracted posts, comments, and user interactions related to the specific campaigns under study. The time frame for data collection was set from January 2021 to December 2022 to capture recent trends and responses to ongoing public health issues.

The data were analyzed using thematic coding, a method suitable for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initially, all social media posts and user interactions were imported into NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software, to facilitate systematic coding.

Sentiment Analysis

In addition to thematic coding, sentiment analysis was performed to evaluate the emotional tone of public responses to the campaigns across the selected social media platforms. Sentiment analysis was conducted using a combination of automated tools and manual validation. We used a pre-trained sentiment analysis model from the VADER (Valence Aware Dictionary for Sentiment Reasoning) algorithm specifically designed to handle social media text. VADER assigns

sentiment scores to textual data, classifying them as positive, negative, or neutral based on predefined lexical features.

The sentiment analysis was carried out in the following steps:

1. **Data Preparation:** Textual data, including comments, replies, and tweets, were preprocessed by removing irrelevant content, such as URLs, hashtags, and emojis, that could distort the sentiment results.
2. **Sentiment Scoring:** The cleaned data were then analyzed using the VADER algorithm, calculating sentiment polarity for each comment. A score above 0.05 was classified as positive, between -0.05 and 0.05 as neutral, and below -0.05 as negative.
3. **Manual Validation:** To ensure accuracy, two independent researchers independently reviewed a subset of the analyzed data to cross-check the sentiment classifications. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion to improve the overall reliability of the automated sentiment analysis results. This combined approach allowed us to capture a nuanced view of public sentiment, accounting for the variability of social media language and platform-specific communication styles.

Open Coding

In the first phase, open coding was performed, where the data were read line-by-line, and initial codes were assigned to chunks of data that appeared significant or relevant to the research questions. This step generated a wide range of preliminary codes that captured diverse aspects of the data.

Axial Coding

In the second phase, axial coding was conducted to identify relationships between codes and to organize them into broader categories. This step helped in clustering similar codes and distinguishing between different themes related to the impact of social media on the effectiveness of public health campaigns.

Selective Coding

Finally, selective coding was employed to refine the categories and identify core themes that encapsulated the study's central findings. This phase involved integrating and refining the categories to form a coherent narrative that addressed the research objectives.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the trustworthiness of the analysis, several strategies were employed:

- Data from multiple social media platforms

(Facebook, Twitter, Instagram) were triangulated to validate findings and ensure a comprehensive analysis.

- Preliminary findings were shared with a small group of public health experts and social media analysts to verify the accuracy and relevance of the interpretations.
- The research process and findings were regularly discussed with colleagues to gain critical feedback and challenge potential biases or assumptions.

Given the nature of social media data, ethical considerations were paramount. The study adhered to ethical guidelines for research involving publicly available data. No personally identifiable information (PII) was collected or reported. In addition, all data were anonymized before analysis to ensure the privacy and confidentiality of individuals who interacted with the public health campaigns.

Results

This chapter presents the findings from the qualitative content analysis of social media interactions with public health campaigns conducted by the CDC, WHO, and UNICEF. The analysis revealed several key themes that highlight social media's impact on these campaigns' effectiveness. These themes include engagement levels, sentiment analysis, and misinformation spread. The findings are presented with supporting tables and figures to illustrate the key points.

Engagement Levels

The analysis revealed significant variations in engagement across different campaigns and platforms. However, it is important to note that comparing engagement metrics based on absolute numbers of likes, shares, and comments can be problematic without considering the varying user bases and follower counts on each platform. Facebook, for example, has a significantly larger user base than Twitter or Instagram, which naturally leads to higher engagement in terms of likes and shares. Similarly, the follower counts for each campaign or organization on these platforms were not available, which limits the ability to draw meaningful conclusions about relative engagement levels.

Table 1:*Average Engagement Metrics Across Social Media Platforms.*

Organization	Campaign	Platform	Likes	Shares	Comments	Retweets
CDC	COVID-19 Vaccine	Facebook	5,234	1,123	3,456	N/A
		Twitter	3,789	N/A	2,045	1,892
		Instagram	4,567	1,678	2,789	N/A
WHO	Anti-Smoking	Facebook	4,112	987	2,234	N/A
		Twitter	2,945	N/A	1,123	1,456
		Instagram	3,678	1,345	2,012	N/A
UNICEF	Childhood Immunization	Facebook	6,789	1,456	4,567	N/A
		Twitter	4,123	N/A	2,678	2,345
		Instagram	5,234	1,789	3,456	N/A

The analysis revealed notable variations in engagement levels across different public health campaigns and social media platforms. Examining the average engagement metrics—likes, shares, comments, and retweets—across Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram provided valuable insights into the effectiveness of each organization's campaign. For the CDC's COVID-19 Vaccine campaign, Facebook emerged as the platform with the highest average likes (5,234), followed closely by Instagram (4,567), while Twitter garnered slightly lower engagement (3,789). Interestingly, comments on Facebook outnumbered those on Instagram, indicating a preference among users for engaging in discussions on this platform. On the other hand, Twitter showed significant engagement in comments and retweets, suggesting active participation and dissemination of campaign messages.

The WHO's Anti-Smoking campaign also demonstrated varying engagement levels across platforms. Facebook and Instagram exhibited similar patterns, with Facebook recording slightly higher average likes (4,112) compared to Instagram (3,678). However, Twitter showed comparatively lower engagement metrics, particularly in terms of likes and comments, indicating a potential difference in audience demographics or user behavior on this platform. Similarly, UNICEF's Childhood Immunization campaign displayed distinct engagement patterns across platforms. Facebook once again emerged as the platform with the highest average likes (6,789), followed by Instagram (5,234) and Twitter (4,123). Notably, Twitter demonstrated

significant engagement in terms of comments and retweets, suggesting active participation and sharing of campaign content within the Twitter community.

The analysis of engagement metrics shows that while Facebook consistently garnered the highest average number of likes and shares across campaigns, this is likely influenced by the platform's larger user base. With a smaller yet highly active user base, Instagram also performed well, especially for visual campaigns. Despite having lower absolute engagement numbers, Twitter showed high participation through comments and retweets, reflecting the platform's propensity for discussions and content dissemination. However, it is difficult to compare engagement meaningfully without detailed information about follower counts on each platform. For example, a campaign with fewer followers on Twitter but higher comment and retweet rates could still be highly effective relative to its audience size. This highlights the need to factor in both platform-specific dynamics and audience reach when assessing campaign performance. Future research should aim to include follower counts or normalize engagement metrics to provide a clearer comparison of platform effectiveness. This would allow for a more accurate understanding of how different platforms contribute to campaign engagement and reach.

Sentiment Analysis

Sentiment analysis revealed mixed public responses to the campaigns, with notable variations across platforms and topics. Table 2 summarizes the sentiment distribution for each campaign, categorized as positive, negative, or neutral.

Table 2:*Sentiment Analysis of Public Health Campaigns on Social Media*

Campaign	Platform	Positive (%)	Negative (%)	Neutral (%)
CDC COVID-19 Vaccine Promotion	Facebook	55	30	15
	Twitter	50	35	15
	Instagram	60	25	15
WHO Anti-Smoking Initiative	Facebook	60	25	15
	Twitter	55	30	15
	Instagram	65	20	15
UNICEF Childhood Immunization	Facebook	70	20	10
	Twitter	65	25	10
	Instagram	75	15	10

The sentiment analysis of public responses to the examined campaigns unveiled a diverse range of reactions, showcasing a blend of positive, negative, and neutral sentiments across various social media platforms and campaign topics. Each campaign elicited unique patterns of sentiment distribution, indicating nuanced perceptions and engagement dynamics among online audiences. For the CDC COVID-19 Vaccine Promotion, sentiments varied slightly across platforms. While Facebook and Twitter exhibited comparable distributions of positive, negative, and neutral sentiments, Instagram users tended to express more positivity towards the campaign, with a notably higher percentage of positive sentiment across all platforms.

Similarly, the WHO Anti-Smoking Initiative garnered mixed reactions from the public, albeit with a higher prevalence of positive sentiments across all platforms compared to the CDC campaign. Notably, Instagram users exhibited the most positive sentiment towards the anti-smoking initiative, suggesting a potential platform-specific affinity for health-related content. In contrast, the sentiment analysis of the UNICEF Childhood Immunization campaign revealed the most overwhelmingly positive response from the public, particularly on Instagram. Facebook and Twitter also demonstrated predominantly positive sentiments, albeit with slightly lower percentages compared to Instagram.

Positive responses often highlighted personal stories and endorsements of the public health messages. On Instagram, for example, users frequently shared their vaccination experiences, tagged friends, and used campaign hashtags to show support. The WHO's anti-smoking posts on Facebook were met with numerous testimonials from individuals who

successfully quit smoking, attributing their success to the resources provided by the campaign. Negative responses were primarily centred around vaccine hesitancy, misinformation, and distrust in health authorities, particularly evident in the comments on CDC's Twitter posts. Anti-vaccine rhetoric and conspiracy theories were prevalent, reflecting significant challenges in countering misinformation. Similarly, some users expressed scepticism about the effectiveness of anti-smoking measures, questioning the WHO's approach and advocating for alternative solutions.

Overall, the sentiment analysis underscores the complex interplay between campaign messaging, platform dynamics, and audience engagement. While some campaigns elicited predominantly positive reactions, others encountered more varied sentiment distributions, highlighting the importance of tailoring communication strategies to specific platforms and target audiences.

Misinformation Spread

Misinformation is defined as false or misleading information that is spread, regardless of intent, which can distort public understanding and hinder informed decision-making (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017). This study identified misinformation through a systematic content analysis, whereby trained coders reviewed public comments on social media posts related to public health campaigns. Following a pre-established set of criteria based on guidelines from reputable organizations such as the CDC, WHO, and UNICEF, these coders determined whether a comment contained misinformation. Comments contradicting verified scientific facts or promoting debunked myths were categorized as misinformation.

Table 3:
Types of Misinformation Detected

Organization	Campaign	Misinformation Type	Frequency
CDC	COVID-19 Vaccine	Vaccine efficacy doubts	125
		Vaccine side effects	89
		Conspiracy theories	47
WHO	Anti-Smoking	False benefits of smoking	62
		Misleading cessation methods	38
UNICEF	Childhood Immunization	Vaccine-autism link	103
		Natural immunity arguments	54

As shown in Table 3, misinformation was particularly prevalent in the CDC's COVID-19 vaccine campaign. Common types of misinformation included doubts about vaccine efficacy and concerns regarding side effects, both of which have been widely debunked by medical experts (Betsch et al., 2020). These false narratives were disseminated frequently, underscoring public health campaigns' significant challenge in addressing and neutralizing misinformation.

Additionally, the WHO's anti-smoking campaign faced the spread of misinformation related to the purported benefits of smoking, as well as misleading claims about smoking cessation methods, which have been discredited by health professionals (Gravely et al., 2017). Similarly, UNICEF's childhood immunization campaign encountered myths such as a supposed link between vaccines and autism—despite overwhelming scientific evidence refuting this claim (Hussain et al., 2018)—and arguments favoring natural immunity over-vaccination, which is a common misconception.

To effectively combat misinformation, strategies must be multifaceted. This includes proactive monitoring of online content, rapid response mechanisms to address falsehoods, and active engagement with online communities to promote accurate information (Lewandowsky et al., 2020). For instance, comments containing misinformation were flagged and escalated to platform administrators, though responses from administrators varied. In some cases, administrators removed false content or added fact-checking labels to posts, while in other cases, misinformation persisted without direct intervention. A more consistent and coordinated approach from platform administrators, such as immediate content removal or correction, could further strengthen the fight against misinformation (Pennycook et al., 2020). By ensuring these interventions are rapid and well-coordinated, public health authorities can better

mitigate the spread of falsehoods and foster a more informed public discourse.

Thematic Analysis

The thematic analysis identified three major themes that encapsulate the public's interaction with the health campaigns on social media: information dissemination, public trust, and community engagement.

Information Dissemination

In information dissemination, the efficacy of accurate information emerged as a pivotal theme throughout the analysis. Social media platforms proved to be potent tools for distributing health-related content, particularly when employing visually engaging formats such as infographics, videos, and interactive materials. Posts incorporating these multimedia elements consistently garnered heightened levels of engagement and elicited positive feedback from the online community. Notably, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) exemplified this trend with its strategic use of social media. Posts disseminating clear, concise information regarding vaccine efficacy and safety witnessed widespread sharing and elicited many affirmative comments. Infographics succinctly summarizing key vaccine-related data and visually appealing videos outlining the vaccination process and addressing common concerns resonated profoundly with audiences. These posts captured attention and facilitated comprehension, fostering a sense of trust and confidence among viewers.

Conversely, posts laden with dense text and technical terminology proved to be less effective in engaging audiences and conveying key messages. Analysis revealed a notable disparity in content reception based on its format and presentation. Text-heavy posts tended to be overlooked or received minimal interaction compared to their visually

stimulating counterparts. The accessibility and readability of content emerged as critical factors influencing audience engagement, underscoring the importance of tailoring communication strategies to suit social media users' preferences and browsing habits. Overall, the findings underscore the significance of adopting innovative approaches to information dissemination on social media platforms. By leveraging multimedia formats and prioritizing clarity and simplicity in messaging, public health organizations can maximize the reach and impact of their campaigns, effectively empowering individuals to make informed decisions regarding their health and well-being.

Public Trust

Public trust emerged as a prominent theme in the analysis, highlighting its pivotal role in shaping user engagement with public health campaigns on social media platforms. The findings revealed a strong correlation between the perceived credibility and trustworthiness of the organizations behind the campaigns and users' receptiveness to their messages. Users exhibited a greater propensity to engage positively with campaigns endorsed by organizations they deemed credible and trustworthy. The analysis compared the public trust garnered by three prominent health organizations—UNICEF, WHO, and CDC—across their social media campaigns. While UNICEF's campaigns appeared to generate more likes and shares in the specific campaign analyzed, this should not be interpreted as conclusive evidence of UNICEF's overall superiority in credibility or trustworthiness compared to WHO or CDC. The number of likes and shares reflects only one aspect of public engagement and can be influenced by factors such as campaign reach, content type, or timing. Importantly, follower counts and other contextual factors (e.g., audience demographics, frequency of posts) were not directly compared, and these variables can significantly impact the level of engagement.

Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge that while social media metrics like likes and shares provide insight into public engagement, they may not fully reflect the broader public trust in the organization. Factors such as long-term reputation, transparency, and consistently providing reliable information play more comprehensive roles in shaping trust. Moreover, the analysis did not find specific evidence of responses from organizational administrators to comments sharing misinformation on these platforms. Addressing misinformation is critical to building and maintaining public trust, especially in

the digital era, where misinformation can spread rapidly. Organizations like UNICEF, WHO, and CDC must actively manage their communication channels by responding to misinformation, fostering transparency, and engaging with users meaningfully. Doing so would further strengthen public trust and enhance the impact of their health campaigns.

This phenomenon underscores the significance of organizational reputation and perceived trustworthiness in influencing public perception and behavior regarding public health campaigns. The organization's credibility plays a crucial role in shaping users' attitudes and responses to campaign messages disseminated through social media channels. Organizations can cultivate trust-based relationships that foster positive engagement and health-related outcomes by prioritizing transparency, integrity, and consistent interaction with the online community.

Community Engagement

Community engagement has emerged as a key determinant in the success and impact of public health campaigns. Research demonstrates that campaigns leveraging interactive digital tools, such as polls, question-and-answer sessions, and sharing community stories on social media platforms, often achieve higher levels of audience participation and effectiveness (Smith et al., 2021). For instance, in a study examining the effectiveness of social media in health promotion, researchers found that campaigns incorporating user interaction resulted in a 35% higher engagement rate compared to those relying solely on traditional communication methods (Jones & White, 2020).

A notable example is the World Health Organization's (WHO) anti-smoking campaign, which utilized a combination of user-generated content and success stories to foster a supportive online community. In one case, participants who shared their experiences of quitting smoking reported feeling more motivated to remain smoke-free, as documented in a follow-up survey conducted by the WHO. The survey revealed that 67% of participants felt more committed to their goals after engaging with the community (WHO, 2019). This engagement extended beyond online interactions—community members organized offline support groups, which played a vital role in sustaining long-term behavioral changes, as reflected in a reported 20% decrease in smoking rates among participants after one year (Garcia et al., 2021).

The inclusion of personal narratives and

testimonials proved to be a powerful driver of behavior change. For example, WHO’s campaign found that participants who interacted with personal stories on social media were 40% more likely to initiate a quit attempt compared to those who encountered only generic health messaging (WHO, 2019). By creating a participatory environment where individuals could share experiences, offer advice, and seek support, the campaign effectively transitioned from a one-way dissemination model to an interactive, community-driven approach. This approach expanded the campaign’s reach and fostered

deeper connections and sustained engagement, illustrating how community involvement can amplify the impact of public health initiatives.

Comparative Analysis

The comparative analysis of the three campaigns—CDC’s COVID-19 Vaccine, WHO’s Anti-Smoking, and UNICEF’s Childhood Immunization—reveals notable differences in effectiveness, which can be attributed to their distinct engagement strategies. The findings are summarized in Table 4 below.

Table 4:
Comparative Analysis of Campaign Effectiveness

Organization	Campaign	Engagement Strategy	Effectiveness
CDC	COVID-19 Vaccine	Informative posts, infographics	Moderate
WHO	Anti-Smoking	Community stories, Q&A	High
UNICEF	Childhood Immunization	Trust-based messaging, videos	Very High

1. UNICEF’s Childhood Immunization Campaign:

o Engagement Strategy: The use of trust-based messaging and high-quality video content played a critical role in the campaign’s success. Trust-based messaging created a sense of credibility and reassurance among the target audience while engaging videos facilitated better information retention and emotional connection. This combination likely enhanced public trust and willingness to participate in immunization programs.

o Effectiveness Justification: Studies have shown that campaigns utilizing emotional and trust-building content tend to achieve higher levels of engagement and behavioral change (Smith, 2021; Johnson & Lee, 2022). These findings support the “very high” effectiveness rating, as the use of videos and trust-based approaches aligns with established best practices in health communication.

2. WHO’s Anti-Smoking Campaign:

o Engagement Strategy: The focus on community stories and Q&A sessions fostered a participatory approach, allowing individuals to share personal experiences and seek information interactively. This approach engaged the community and personalized the message, making it more relatable and impactful.

o Effectiveness Justification: Research highlights that community-driven campaigns with interactive elements often result in higher engagement and perceived relevance (Brown et al., 2020). The “high” effectiveness rating reflects the positive impact of these strategies, as evidenced by increased public participation and support for anti-smoking initiatives.

3. CDC’s COVID-19 Vaccine Campaign:

o Engagement Strategy: The CDC’s reliance on informative posts and infographics provided essential information but may have lacked the interactive and engaging elements seen in the other campaigns. Additionally, the campaign faced challenges such as misinformation and fluctuating public sentiment, which could have undermined its effectiveness.

o Effectiveness Justification: The moderate effectiveness rating is consistent with the challenges faced by similar public health campaigns during the COVID-19 pandemic (Williams & Clarke, 2023). The effectiveness of informative posts alone, without addressing misinformation or incorporating interactive elements, may have limited the campaign’s overall impact.

The differences in campaign effectiveness can be largely attributed to the nature of the engagement strategies employed. UNICEF’s use of trust-based messaging and engaging videos, WHO’s community-

focused approach, and the CDC's informational strategy each contributed differently to the success of the campaigns. This analysis highlights the importance of tailored engagement strategies in achieving desired outcomes in public health campaigns.

Challenges and Limitations

The pervasive spread of misinformation significantly hindered the effectiveness of the campaigns. Despite efforts to provide accurate information, false narratives often gained traction more quickly. The varying algorithms of social media platforms affected the visibility and reach of posts. For instance, Instagram's algorithm favored visually appealing content, while Twitter's emphasis on real-time updates influenced engagement patterns. The demographic differences among users of different platforms also impacted engagement levels. Younger users on Instagram were more responsive to interactive content, whereas older users on Facebook preferred detailed posts. The timing of posts played a crucial role in engagement. Posts made during peak hours received more interaction, highlighting the importance of strategic timing in social media campaigns.

The results of this study underscore the significant impact of social media on the effectiveness of public health campaigns. While social media platforms offer powerful tools for disseminating health information and engaging with the public, the challenges of misinformation and varying platform dynamics must be carefully managed. High levels of trust, community engagement, and the use of engaging content formats characterize effective campaigns. Public health organizations should continue to leverage these platforms while developing strategies to combat misinformation and enhance public trust.

Discussion

The qualitative content analysis of social media interactions with public health campaigns conducted by esteemed organizations like the CDC, WHO, and UNICEF has shed light on the intricate dynamics of health communication in today's digital age. This discussion aims to amalgamate these findings with existing literature, unveiling pivotal insights and implications for future public health campaigns on social media. The advent of social media has fundamentally transformed the landscape of public health communication, presenting unparalleled opportunities for the dissemination of health information, engaging diverse demographics, and catalyzing behavioral shifts. Aligned with prior scholarly investigations (Moorhead et al., [2013](#)), our

research reaffirms the central role of social media platforms in amplifying public health messages and fostering interactive dialogue with target audiences. Notably, the CDC's COVID-19 vaccine campaign is a prime example of social media's potential to disseminate critical health information while fostering public engagement swiftly. This is evidenced by the substantial levels of likes, shares, and comments observed across various social media platforms.

One of the primary revelations from our qualitative content analysis pertains to the multifaceted nature of social media interactions within public health campaigns. Beyond serving as mere conduits for information dissemination, social media platforms function as dynamic arenas where individuals actively engage with health content, express opinions, seek clarification, and share personal experiences. This interactive dimension underscores the importance of fostering meaningful dialogue and cultivating a sense of community within online health spaces. Furthermore, our analysis highlights the diverse array of strategies public health organizations employ to optimize social media engagement. From visually compelling infographics and educational videos to interactive Q&A sessions and user-generated content initiatives, these campaigns leverage a spectrum of tactics to capture and retain audience attention. Importantly, the success of these strategies is contingent upon factors such as message resonance, cultural relevance, and platform appropriateness. Importantly, our findings underscore the nuanced challenges inherent in navigating the digital health communication landscape. While social media offers unparalleled reach and accessibility, it also presents inherent risks, including the proliferation of misinformation, echo chambers, and algorithmic biases. Addressing these challenges necessitates a multifaceted approach encompassing media literacy initiatives, collaboration with tech platforms, and proactive community engagement efforts.

Synthesizing these insights with existing literature, several implications emerge for designing and implementing future public health campaigns on social media. Firstly, campaigns should prioritize audience segmentation and tailored messaging to resonate with diverse demographic groups effectively. Secondly, fostering two-way communication and community-building initiatives can enhance engagement and foster trust between public health entities and their online audiences. Thirdly, efforts to combat misinformation and promote health literacy should be integrated into campaign strategies, leveraging both traditional and innovative

approaches. The qualitative content analysis of social media interactions with public health campaigns conducted by prominent organizations like the CDC, WHO, and UNICEF illuminates the complex interplay between digital technologies and health communication. By synthesizing these findings with existing literature, this discussion provides valuable insights and actionable recommendations for the development of future public health campaigns on social media. As we continue to navigate the evolving digital landscape, harnessing the potential of social media platforms holds immense promise in advancing global health agendas and fostering informed empowered communities.

The rise of social media platforms has undoubtedly revolutionized the way information is disseminated, enabling rapid communication and widespread connectivity on a global scale. However, alongside its benefits, social media presents formidable challenges, chief among them being the proliferation of misinformation (Vosoughi et al., 2018). Our analysis corroborates previous findings, demonstrating the prevalence of vaccine-related misinformation across the examined campaigns. Misinformation on social media platforms can significantly undermine public health efforts. False or misleading claims about vaccines, their efficacy, and safety can erode trust in vaccination programs, leading to decreased vaccine uptake and increased susceptibility to preventable diseases. This underscores the urgent need for public health agencies to effectively implement robust fact-checking mechanisms and educational initiatives to counter false narratives.

Moreover, the algorithmic nature of social media platforms poses challenges in terms of content visibility and audience engagement. Algorithms determine which content appears on users' feeds based on various factors, including relevance, popularity, and user behavior. As a result, misinformation can spread rapidly, reaching a wide audience before corrective measures can be implemented. Our findings highlight the importance of understanding platform-specific dynamics and tailoring communication strategies accordingly to optimize reach and impact (Flaxman et al., 2016). Public health agencies must navigate these challenges by adopting a multifaceted approach to combat misinformation on social media. Firstly, investing in robust fact-checking mechanisms is essential to promptly identify and debunk false claims. By partnering with reputable sources and leveraging data-driven analytics, public health authorities can effectively monitor and respond to misinformation in real-time. Additionally, educational initiatives play

a crucial role in empowering individuals to evaluate information encountered on social media platforms critically. Public health campaigns should promote health literacy skills, teach individuals how to identify credible sources, recognize misinformation, and verify claims before sharing them online. By equipping the public with the tools to discern fact from fiction, we can mitigate the impact of misinformation on public health outcomes.

Furthermore, collaboration with social media companies is essential to address the algorithmic amplification of misinformation. Platforms must prioritize the integrity of health-related content and implement measures to reduce the spread of false information. This may include algorithmic adjustments to prioritize authoritative sources, labeling or removing misleading content, and providing users with access to accurate information from trusted sources. Combating misinformation on social media requires a concerted effort from multiple stakeholders, including public health agencies, social media platforms, healthcare professionals, and the public. By working together to promote accurate information, foster critical thinking skills, and address platform-specific challenges, we can mitigate the impact of misinformation on public health and safeguard the well-being of communities worldwide.

Several strategies emerge from our analysis and align with existing literature to maximize the effectiveness of public health campaigns on social media. First and foremost is the importance of building trust through transparency and engagement (Fernández-Luque & Bau, 2015). Public health organizations must prioritize authenticity and credibility in their communication efforts to foster trust among online communities. Collaborations with influencers and community leaders can further enhance credibility and amplify campaign messages (Hoffman et al., 2020). Moreover, the integration of multimedia content and interactive elements is essential for making health messages more engaging and accessible (Neiger et al., 2013). Our findings underscore the effectiveness of visually stimulating formats, such as videos and infographics, in capturing audience attention and facilitating comprehension. Real-time interaction through features like live chats and Q&A sessions further enhances engagement and enables personalized communication with the audience (Ferdous, 2023).

While social media presents both opportunities and challenges for public health communication, strategic utilization of these platforms holds immense potential for advancing population health goals.

By leveraging targeted communication strategies, engaging content formats, and trusted voices, public health agencies can harness the power of social media to inform, inspire, and empower individuals to make informed health decisions. In recent years, social media platforms have emerged as powerful tools for disseminating public health messages and engaging with diverse audiences. However, the effectiveness of these campaigns depends on various factors, including the source's credibility, the content's relevance, and the level of audience engagement. Drawing insights from both research and practical experiences, we propose several strategies to enhance the impact of public health campaigns on social media.

Firstly, building trust is paramount in any public health communication effort. Transparency and authenticity are key to establishing credibility with online communities (Fernández-Luque & Bau, 2015). Public health organizations should strive to be transparent about their objectives, methodologies, and sources of information. They can foster trust and credibility by openly sharing information and engaging in dialogue with their audience. Collaborating with influencers and community leaders can also enhance the reach and impact of public health campaigns. These individuals often have established networks and credibility within specific communities, making them valuable partners in spreading health messages (Hoffman et al., 2020). Public health organizations can tap into new audiences and amplify their messages by partnering with influencers who align with their values and objectives.

In addition to building trust and credibility, it is essential to make health messages engaging and accessible to diverse audiences. Multimedia content, such as videos, infographics, and interactive quizzes, can help capture audience attention and facilitate understanding (Neiger et al., 2013). Visuals are particularly effective in conveying complex health information in a digestible format. Public health organizations can incorporate multimedia elements into their campaigns to increase audience engagement and message retention. Furthermore, real-time interaction features on social media platforms can facilitate two-way communication between public health organizations and their audience. Features such as live chats, Q&A sessions, and polls enable direct engagement with users, allowing for personalized communication and addressing of specific concerns (Ferdous, 2023). This interactive approach not only fosters a sense of community but also enables public health organizations to tailor their messages to the needs and preferences of their audience.

While social media presents numerous opportunities for public health communication, it also poses challenges such as misinformation and algorithmic biases. To overcome these challenges, public health organizations must employ targeted communication strategies that prioritize accuracy, relevance, and inclusivity. By leveraging the strengths of social media platforms and adopting evidence-based communication practices, public health agencies can maximize the impact of their campaigns and contribute to improved health outcomes in communities worldwide.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research underscores the transformative impact of social media on health communication in the contemporary digital landscape. With traditional media gradually ceding ground to online platforms, public health campaigns now harness the power of social media giants such as Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram to disseminate information, engage communities, and drive behavior change in real-time. However, alongside the immense opportunities for global reach and interaction, social media also presents formidable challenges, including the proliferation of misinformation and disparities in digital literacy. Through a comprehensive evaluation of social media's role in public health campaigns, this study has provided valuable insights into its utilization, effectiveness, challenges, and best practices. Examining noteworthy campaigns such as “#ThisIsOurShot” for COVID-19 vaccination and the “Truth” campaign against youth smoking has illuminated the potential of social media to catalyze positive health outcomes.

Drawing upon established theoretical frameworks like the Health Belief Model and the Diffusion of Innovations Theory has enriched our understanding of the individual beliefs and social dynamics that shape health behaviors and message diffusion. By integrating these theories into the design of social media campaigns, we can tailor interventions to address both individual perceptions and broader community influences, thereby maximizing impact. Despite the hurdles posed by misinformation and algorithm biases, the integration of social media into public health strategies holds immense promise for improving health outcomes and nurturing informed societies. Moving forward, it is imperative that future research focuses on empirically testing integrated approaches across diverse public health contexts. The methodology employed in this study, which utilized

qualitative content analysis and data triangulation, has provided valuable insights into engagement levels, sentiment distributions, and prevalent misinformation across different campaigns and social media platforms. Our thematic analysis identified four key themes—Information Dissemination, Public Trust, Community Engagement, and Behavioral Influence—underscoring the multifaceted nature of effective health communication on social media. Strategies such as building trust, utilizing engaging multimedia, and fostering real-time interaction emerged as crucial determinants of campaign success. However, ongoing efforts are needed to combat misinformation, optimize content visibility, and assess the long-term impact of campaigns on health behaviors.

In conclusion, this research highlights social media's pivotal role in shaping health communication's future. By leveraging its potential while mitigating its pitfalls, we can harness the power of digital dialogues to promote health equity, foster informed decision-making, and ultimately improve the well-being of individuals and communities worldwide. Future research should continue to explore innovative strategies for combating misinformation, optimizing content visibility, and fostering community engagement on social media platforms. Additionally, longitudinal studies are warranted to assess the long-term impact of social media campaigns on health behaviors and outcomes.


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Convergence Processes and Digital Transformation in Polish Media Companies

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Instagram, journalist, social media, communication, personal brand

ABSTRACT

The thematic scope of the paper outlines the direction of transformation of Polish media concerns and Polish branches of global concerns, which are transforming into media-technology concerns, as well as technology-based multi-business holdings. The aim of this paper and the research conducted is to find out how the use of convergence processes and digital transformation influence the activities of Polish media concerns. It is particularly important to establish what business activities Polish media concerns undertake in response to the dynamic development of technology and what role convergence plays in formulating the product offer of media concerns. The paper presents selected projects and business steps undertaken by the companies in 2020-2023 and the accompanying convergence processes. The research was carried out in 2023 at corporations: ZPR Media Group, Ringier Axel Springer Poland, TVN Warner Bros. Discovery, Wirtualna Polska Holding, Polska Press, Polityka, Agora Group. The selected years of activity of the Polish concerns included in the analysis corresponded to the dynamic growth in technology development and market changes that accompanied the COVID-19 pandemic.

Introduction

The Polish media market is divided between large Polish and international concerns, with little participation from local publisher groups and associations. Adam Szyńol (2017) points out that the over-representation of foreign concerns in the Polish media market has been repeatedly addressed in the political, media and social space, although it gained new resonance after the 2015 presidential and parliamentary elections.

In the context of the digital transformation of the media, it is characterized by the process of media, meaning that 'traditional' media - the press, radio and television - are 'moving' to the Internet, and the mediatization of the Internet. In this case, it is the media that are 'mastering' the Internet, making it a super-media. The old media increasingly make use of the new technologies, while the new ones absorb their original functions and, according to the concept of remediation, become remediated, modified media adapted to the new technological environment (Jedrzejewski, 2019).

The digital transformation in media companies would not have been possible without the development of the offerings and rapid market response of global technology companies. They were the biggest beneficiaries of the global crisis. Alicja Jaskiernia (2021) wrote about the impact of technology and the development of conglomerate dominance on the basis of the pandemic, emphasizing that the radical transformation of everyday life on the planet, forced by the COVID-19 pandemic, resulted in an accelerated convergence of social and private space through online tools.

This process in the context of media communication has been addressed by Tomasz

Goban-Klas (2020), emphasizing that it has intensified in the form of mobile phone call, Internet audio and video communication, group communication, as well as the use of classic mass media - radio and television (in terrestrial, cable and satellite form) and streaming music and movie services (Spotify, Netflix and others). Jay Dawid Bolter and Richard Grusin (2000) have a similar perspective on the convergence processes presented; they define convergence as the mutual remediation of at least three important technologies - telephone, television and computer - each of them being hybrid of technical, social and economic practices offering its own path of immediacy. Convergence brings together all the media on the Internet to form integrated transmedia systems. At the same time, however, working in the opposite direction, divergence prevents the convergent environment from reaching any final form and solidifying into a total final assemblage (Kluszczyński, 2020).

The attempt to describe the transformation of media corporations in this paper comes down to presenting the ongoing processes that modify these entities into digital enterprises. Typically, this term refers to companies such as Amazon.com, Google, Facebook or Ticketmaster, which use computers and IT systems to automate most business processes and gain competitive advantage through increased employee productivity, improved efficiency, process effectiveness and a higher level of interactivity between suppliers and customers (King et al., 2018). In the corporations mentioned above, as in the described media concerns, the potential of a company is formed by three basic aspects of its operation: knowledge, organization, and finances, because of which we can speak of substantive, organizational

potential, respectively (Lange-Sadzinska, 2017). The most important resource of the concerns described in this paper is data, and the increasing amount of data determines the increase of each of the company's potential. Multinational corporations are taking over a certain range of traditional state functions, covering a significant part of research costs protecting new technologies and intellectual property (Wątroba, 2009).

The transformations of the media environment under the influence of digitalisation (a feature of deep mediatization) and the associated processes of analyzing and processing data - motivated by economic profits - are prompting media scholars to redefine the term 'media', which is fundamental to media studies (Ptaszek, 2019). One of the definitions correlating media with data was provided by Lev Manovich (2006), describing new media as analogue media converted to digital form, characterized by free access to data, the potential for lossless reproduction (quality-preserving copying) and interactivity, but it is data that has become today's most coveted and protected commodity, and due to data processing media corporations are transforming towards media technology concerns.

Methodology of research

In light of the research conducted, information was obtained from a wide range of areas, whose structures and processes could be understood through in-depth interviews with the executives responsible for maintaining each of them. Experts included members of the management board, those responsible for the development of new models and channels for monetizing the product mix, product managers, and directors of publishing areas and content production. The vast majority covered technological and economic convergence processes.

The author conducted in-depth interviews on each of the seven concerns surveyed. In the Agora Group, two interviews were conducted with persons responsible for the indicated areas due to the in-depth study of the radio and Internet portals. Between April and September 2023, eight IDI interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format at the headquarters of the concerns (2 interviews) and online (6 interviews). The data was analyzed based on segregation into thematic blocks with questions that were developed for the interview. The interviews discussed, among other things, the internal processes that define the work of the concern, the areas of content production, the technological background and projects undertaken by own brands.

In the course of the research, the material thus obtained was verified on the basis of an analysis of the existing data using financial statements, activity reports, articles and press releases, reports and the content of the websites of the corporations under study. Due to methodological triangulation, in order to deepen the knowledge of cross-product convergence, a comparative analysis was used, juxtaposing two forms of a single product: traditional (in the case of newspapers) and online, and in the case of other products: a browser (desktop) version and a version designed for mobile devices.

ZPR Media Group

The ZPR Media Group, which was subject to the research, belongs to an extended structure of the Zjednoczone Przedsiębiorstwa Rozrywkowe S.A. company established in 1991. The company is also the main direct and indirect shareholder of numerous entities operating in the following areas: radio (i.a. press (Super Express, Murator, among others), television and commercial production (ZPR Media, among others), business services (Super Media, Pollster), books and photography (HARDE Publishing House, Lekkie Publishing House,) gastronomy (Bio Smaki, Super Smaki), real estate management (Murator IBS, Murator FM) (Zjednoczone Przedsiębiorstwa Rozrywkowe, 2024). An in-depth interview was conducted with one of the group's board members. In it, the expert highlighted the perception of ZPR Media's growth rate, describing it as being a 'permanent start-up', which speaks to the dynamics of a changing market. The video production segment is one of the strongest growing segments in the ZPR Media Group, mainly through its subsidiary companies ZPR Media S.A. and TIME S.A. In 2022, the corporation launched three studios of 500 sq. m, 250 sq. m and 82 sq. m, with complete technological facilities (Studio TV. ZPR Media, 2023). The production of the video mentioned above content and the distribution strategy are based on the technological penetration of content consumption platforms with a particular emphasis on video-on-demand platforms. The content produced can be found on YouTube channels, portals, Facebook, and TikTok.

One of the new video projects by Super Express (SE) based on the penetration of technology was the first footage produced in augmented reality, which was used to prepare the special programme 'Year of War'. It was broadcast on March 2 2023. The set design was based on the use of so-called assets, which

in this case were 3D models - scanned Ukrainian cities that had suffered in the war. Content-wise, the editorial team of SE was responsible for the release, while technically, Veles Productions company. The virtual scenography was based on the real-time graphics engine Unreal Engine 5.1.

Super Express, one of ZPR Media's flagship press titles, underwent a metamorphosis responding to current trends in content consumption. In July 2022, se.pl web portal, the online version of Super Express, introduced a new graphic design. The aim of the changes was to reflect the tabloid character of the daily newspaper, introducing a responsive design, highlighting photos and video content. Ninety percent of the se.pl audience are mobile phone users, thus, the portal focused on their comfort (Press.pl, July 2022). The paper version of Super Express underwent similar changes.

In the course of the comparative analysis, ten articles published in SE between 21 and 27 October 2023 in the browser version of the portal (desktop) and in the traditional edition were juxtaposed, attempting to obtain data on the number of photographs and graphics used, videos relating to the content of the article, the number of links relating to content-wise connected articles, the number of advertisements placed in the immediate vicinity of the article, the compatibility of the text layer between the browser version and the mobile app, and additional functionalities embedded in the article, such as posts from social networks, maps, weather forecasts.

Concerning the text layer, there are significant differences in the design and content of articles in the printed and online versions, where the latter have a more elaborate formula. Four out of ten articles analyzed share exactly the same content. Considering the use of photos, the online version of Super Express has a definite advantage due to its technical preconditions. The number of photographs used in the traditional version ranges from 1 to 5, while in the online version, it ranges from 2 to 18, with the majority of the above ten photographs. Both the data obtained during the in-depth interview, the comparative analysis, and the analysis of the existing data indicate a priority for the use of graphic materials (especially photos) in both traditional and digital press publications. The change in graphic design, which follows proven solutions (playing with the image and the title) in the traditional form of Super Express, responds to the process of convergence, in this case, the exact similarity between the digital form of the press title and the traditional version.

ZPR Media and its subsidiary companies

produce a large amount of content every day, and the distribution of it requires the involvement of significant technological resources. One example is video content, which is reduced to a content consumption identifier across all platforms. This identifier indicates locations and viewing levels. The expert recalls the technological trend focused on Big Data, while in his opinion, it is important to use the data as Smart Data, hence the work done by analysts in the Business Intelligence department to establish the predictability of consumption on the indicated platform before the material is published. ZPR Media has been using Chat GPT from its 2.5 version.

Based on GPT, the Data Scientist department has developed its own neural network for writing articles that do not require uniqueness, such as weather forecasts for different locations in Poland.

The Technology and Analytics departments play a very large role in the corporation, working in particular on increasing reach and enhancing sales, audience extension and market share. These goals are mostly realized through in-house resources (ZPR has a data warehouse, having collected data for several years), especially using Accorp Sp. z o.o. Company managing Instytut Badań Pollster (Pollster Research Institute) and Internetowy Dom Mediowy net S. A. is a technological firm operating in the programmatic ecosystem and offering, among other things, ads automation. Accorp plays a key role at ZPR, which is focused on data scientists and business intelligence. Amongst other things, its task is to establish consumption predictability on a designated platform. It manages Instytut Badań Pollster, a research panel of 200,000 panellists. Pollster also performs political surveys for external parties. ZPR Group's surveys are certified by, among others, Organizacja Firm Badania Opinii i Rynku (Organisation of Opinion and Market Research Firms).

During the interview, the expert emphasized the Data Science department's great importance to him: 'We have been collecting data for several years now. We have terabytes of data and a subsidiary company in the group with very capable young people. They are Data Science specialists, not analysts. There is a timeline and a clear division: Business Intelligence works backwards and Data Science works forwards. That's why I say Data Science, because they create their own models to recommend content in search of people who are interested in that content.'

Ringier Axel Springer Polska

Ringier Axel Springer Polska has more than a

dozen brands in the print and Internet business. In addition, the company is active in classifieds (Gratka.pl, Morizon.pl, No Fluff Jobs), technology (Ring Publishing - formerly DreamLab) and e-commerce, including Skąpiec and Opineo brands. Ringier Axel Springer Polska's main media platform is Onet.pl. To a large extent, it consists of content originating from the Onet domain, i.e. Onet Wiadomości, Onet Kultura, Onet Podróże, but it also features content from other media portals - Auto Świat, Komputer Świat, Business Insider.

The corporation has been undergoing centralization in the recent past due to the dispersion of the structure into separate companies. When the merger of all the companies of the Onet-RAS Polska Group into the new legal entity Ringier Axel Springer Polska was completed in 2018, it was noted that only centralization and observing from a distance makes it possible to see the profit of the whole organization and not of individual brands (Pallus, 2017).

During the research, attention was drawn to the clause 'care for the quality of press products', which, when juxtaposed with the data analyzed and the business decisions made by the concern, is not clearly directed towards preserving its own traditional press on the market. In the run-up to the IDI interview, RASP HQ announced in March 2023 the start of the roll-out of the third phase of its digital transformation. The first saw the development of an online offering, and the second saw the introduction of digital subscriptions. The corporation announced the transition of the daily newspapers Bild and Die Welt exclusively to online versions (Stawiany, 2023). The activities of the corporate management and the Polish branch indicate a focus on the digital version of the publication and Internet activity orientation. While analyzing the existing data, information on changes in Ringier Axel Springer Polska's internal structure was found to indicate the chosen direction. Maria Ballaun took up the newly created position of head of strategy and portfolio for digital services in August 2022 (Wirtualne Media, April 2023). In the same year, RASP created the Data Journalism team (Ringier Axel Springer Polska, 2022). In May 2023, Jolanta Molińska took up the newly created position of head of editorial for Onet Premium (Portal Medialny, 2023).

The expert also commented on the changing business environment during the in-depth interview: 'We are not the only ones who have strategies developed several years ahead. Of course, it is very difficult because, one month since the launch of artificial intelligence, many things have been turned

upside down. Three months ago, as if we were talking about whether any profession besides the doctor would never be exhausted, we would have said programmer. Today, we know that AI is capable of taking over a very large scope that entry-level programmers handle.'

In its financial statement filed for 2020, Ringier Axel Springer Polska lists among the objectives to be achieved, among others, increasing user engagement by extending the time spent on websites, increasing the quality of advertising space, the share of targeted and data-driven advertising, and providing users with the broadest possible spectrum of content. As for the plan to increase revenue, the conglomerate mentions paid content, content commerce, technology services, and cooperation with its own ad services. These assumptions are replicated in each successive report but are closely linked to the digital space without the involvement of traditional publishing (Ringier Axel Springer Polska Sp. z o.o., financial report, 2020).

The decision to centralize structures within RASP also had publishing implications. In August 2022, the corporation launched a new sports website, PrzegladSportowy.onet.pl, which combined content from Sport.onet.pl and PrzegladSportowy.pl (Erling, 2022). In December 2022, RASP withdrew the paper version of Auto Świat from the market, leaving the website Autoswiat.pl (Sewastianowicz, 2022). In January 2023, Ringier Axel Springer Polska closed the Komputer Świat Plus website in order to develop editorial and subscription content on Komputerswiat.pl. The analysis of the existing data provided a broader picture of the corporation's activities, seeking to acquire technological solutions, start-ups and specialists that can enhance Ringier Axel Springer Polska's ability to operate as a technology media corporation.

In 2021, Ringier Axel Springer Tech ran a broad recruitment campaign under the slogan 'The future of media is written in code', targeting programmers and technology specialists. RASP Tech develops technology for digital media, supporting brands in the group's portfolio (Wirtualne Media, October 2021). In April 2021, Ringier Axel Springer Media and investment company APX announced a programme to support Central and Eastern European start-ups (Ringier Axel Springer Polska, 2021). In 2022, the conglomerate realized investments in the IT recruitment market by acquiring a 70% stake in job search engine No Fluff Jobs. In doing so, RASP is pursuing a strategy of supporting start-ups and turning them into scale-ups (Business Insider Polska, 2022).

The corporation has carried out activities to strengthen RASP's image as a technology company. In March 2021, Business Insider and Forbes announced a competition for the best managers responsible for digitalization - 'Chief Digital Officer of the Year. The Future is Today'. It included a series of expert debates and thematically related texts (Wirtualne Media, March [2021](#)). Also in March 2021, the first episode of the podcast 'Digital Means Future', hosted by Nell Przybylska from the Digital Poland Foundation, was published on Forbes.pl and the Onet homepage. The programme featured the winners of the Digital Shapers Award (Forbes, [2021](#)). In May 2021, the Business Insider TRENDS platform was launched, which brings together activities on business trends and business-changing technologies (Business Insider Polska, [2021](#)).

After the IDI interview, during the analysis of the existing data, information was obtained about the launch of the next edition of the RAS START ME UP programme by RASP in October 2023, taking place under the motto 'AI Awesome Inventors'. The conglomerate was looking for ideas for the media of the future, inviting start-ups using generative AI in four areas to be recruited: AI for editorial, multimedia of the future, marketplace of the future and human engagement in the AI era (Ringier Axel Springer Polska, October 18 [2023](#)).

TVN Warner Bros. Discovery

TVN Group Warner Bros. Discovery has the resources and offers to conduct in-depth research in the TV segment, considering classic linear TV as well as any TV hybrids related to the digital area. The conglomerate reached its position in April 2022 when Discovery and AT&T finalized a merger agreement. The merger between Discovery and WarnerMedia resulted in the creation of Warner Bros. Discovery.

The group is the broadcaster of, among others, TVN, TVN Seven, TTV, TVN 24, TVN 24 BIS, TVN Style, TVN Turbo, HGTV and TVN Fabuła. In addition, it runs news websites included in the research conducted, as well as the premium service TVN24 GO. Much of the information about the corporation's work was obtained due to collaboration with the person responsible for directing the production and coordination of video content in the TVN Group Warner Bros. Discovery (Press.pl, [2021](#)).

According to the expert, there has been a very intense time of technology development recently - moving from 4:3 to 16:9, from SD to full HD. During this period, TVN Group Warner Bros. Discovery focused, among other things, on the creation of

a digital archive. The interlocutor points out that approximately 20 years ago, TVN was one of the first stations to introduce digital file processing. TVN24 in 2020 was the first European TV station to deploy Sony's PXW-Z750 camcorders, enabling improved image quality and providing the basis for 4K production (Sony Polska, [2020](#)), while in 2021 satellite operator Eutelsat signed a multi-year agreement for additional satellite capacity on Hot Bird 13E with the TVN Discovery Group, enabling the group to launch, among other things, channels in 4K (HDTVPolska, [2021](#)).

The expert also stresses the great importance of the development of drones, which has initiated the development of other technologies, such as small camera cars used in the broadcast of speedway races, moving at 80km/h, very fast camera taps, high-speed carts moving on rails, the so-called dolly. The interlocutor points to changes in the technological background of the group, which has a large IT staff and, in his opinion, TVs are slowly becoming technology companies.

In July 2021, TVN Discovery Group, in cooperation with Wizja Multimedia Sp. z o.o., launched the XR studio, operating with augmented reality technology (TVN, [2021](#)), where in March 2022, in cooperation with Wizja Multimedia and Heliograf film rental, it organized the Warsaw Virtual Experience workshop. During this event, the companies' experts presented the possibilities of augmented reality technology and the solutions available at the studio. The meetings were aimed at television, film and advertising professionals (Zawiślak, [2022](#)).

With regard to how video content is prepared and distributed, the expert referred to the described production processes, known as 'production book' and the convergence processes taking place between the ecosystems found in television. The first relates to classic linear television, the second is an extension of television on the Internet, and the third is related to VOD platforms, and the content between them is constantly converging. The MMA gala 'Strife' was pointed out as an example, which, in addition to its TV airing, has a broadcast on online channels, including YouTube.

The expert also draws attention to a rather important problem: 'Here, of course, we can also talk about the borderline of content cannibalization. Cannibalization and its monetization take us on a slippery slope towards rapid content exploitation, as it has been exploited in television for years. It is very apparent, and it is a global trend, that this content has to make money on three platforms: online, VOD and

TV.'

In August 2020, the TVN Discovery Poland concern created a new position of chief technology officer, responsible for coordinating operations in IT, IT infrastructure and cloud systems (Bochyńska, 2020). In turn, in October 2023, TVN Warner Bros. Discovery created the position of head of digital, which is responsible for the group's intensive work on the development of its digital offer (Pallus, 2023). One of the most important projects implemented in 2022 in the TVN S.A. capital group was the development of tool requirements plan assumptions and the implementation of artificial intelligence tests related to the automatic creation of programme content (TVN S.A., financial report, 2022).

The platform on which video content produced by the corporation can be found is Player.pl, which has been a paid platform since February 2021. TVN opted for a subscription model at the expense of advertising reach (Staroń, 2021). Another important moment was the targeting of Player.pl's offer to the e-gaming community - due to economic and technological convergence. In May 2023, the Player service was made available to users of Xbox gaming consoles, thanks to a platform from Redge Technologies (Wamej, 2023).

An important project of the corporation is Player Labs, a web service with the character of an innovation laboratory. Here, Player users act as experts and participate in discussions, missions and tasks concerning the development and future of the service (Player.pl, 2023). The service was one of the most developed projects in 2022. As was Player.pl itself, where a new recommendation and search engine was created (TVN S.A., financial report, 2022).

In the context of format convergence processes, the partnership of two concerns is worth mentioning. In October 2023, Ringier Axel Springer Polska and TVN Warner Bros. Discovery announced the launch of a joint package combining the TVN24 GO and Onet Premium service (Ringier Axel Springer Polska, October 6 2023). TVN24 GO is a paid streaming platform offering the TVN24 and TVN24 BiS news channels, live broadcasts and a database of news and current affairs programmes. The development of the TVN24 GO service itself has been part of the TVN S.A. Group's strategy for several years. In 2020, the emphasis was laid on the application - the development and implementation of the PWA (Progressive Web App) model, one application for web, web mobile, Android and iOS (TVN S.A., financial report, 2020). In 2021, TVN24 GO was integrated into the TVN24.

pl service (TVN S.A., financial report, 2021). And in 2022, a tool for dynamic embedding of programmes from TVN24GO in external services was designed (TVN S.A., financial report, 2022).

Interesting results were obtained during a comparative analysis of 10 articles published on the TVN24 website between 14 and 20 December 2023. Publications published in the desktop browser version and in the mobile app were taken into account. They show consistency in terms of content, images, and hyperlinks. The greatest differences were noted in additional functionality, where 5 out of 10 publications analyzed were compatible in this area. The remainder used embedded boxes with related article videos, which were not present in the mobile version.

Wirtualna Polska Holding

Wirtualna Polska Holding, through its subsidiary companies, is present in many segments of the media and advertising market, some of which it has managed to dominate thanks to its acquisitions. The holding owns websites with the content of the WP Group, led by the portals WP.pl, o2.pl, Money.pl and Pudelek.pl, as well as e-mail websites Poczta WP and Poczta o2. The company owns 100% of its shares in Mediapop, the publisher of i.a. Jastrzabpost.pl, Pysznosci.pl and Genialne.pl. It is also the owner of the Benchmark.pl technology website and the Audioteka audiobook service. Wirtualna Polska Holding dominated the e-commerce version of tourism, owning the Wakacje.pl, Nocowanie.pl and Noclegi.pl brands. The company has also made an investment in the crowdfunding platform Patronite. Wirtualna Polska Holding (WP) is trying to strengthen the direction of development towards building a technology concern. An investment was made in another photovoltaic farm in Lower Silesia, and green energy from its own production already covered almost 80% of WP's demand for powering the server room (Wirtualna Polska, 2023).

One of the most important sources of traffic is the homepage of the Wp.pl portal, which uses the Big Data system and the automated distribution system. An in-depth interview was conducted with the person responsible for this area, but information on the group's technological aspirations should be sought from the holding's other activities. In the management board's report on the company's operations in 2020 and subsequently in the following years, Wirtualna Polska Holding indicates the overarching goal of maintaining the position of the largest Polish technology holding in the media and

e-commerce industry. The group wanted to reach this target by implementing its strategic objectives and development directions. The first was the development of technology, which included the implementation of mechanisms and technologies that enable better and better adaptation of services and content to the expectations of recipients.

Other factors included e-commerce with the potential of the rapidly growing e-commerce market in key product categories, Big Data with the use of the group's key competitive advantage, i.e. various data sets on the consumer behaviour of Poles, and Mobile with the achievement and maintenance of the leading position in Poland in the field of advertising for mobile devices. In January 2020, the company launched a video production space with three studios and a total area of 1500 sq. m. The studios were equipped with production facilities - including camera robots, a 1000-inch video wall, and a set design based on 28 light sectors (Wirtualna Polska, management board report, [2020](#)). In 2021, Wirtualna Polska increased the number of published video materials. It started producing regular news programs covering current news from the country and the world (WP News, WP Newsroom) (Wirtualna Polska, management board report, [2021](#)).

In the area of Big Data, in 2022, Wirtualna Polska Holding continued the goal adopted in previous years to create a data-driven organization with WP, implementing further business dashboards based on developed technologies that support the entire organization's work. In the following years, the company announced the continuation of the development of the analytical hub, implementing new dashboards, expanding data sets and improving their quality (Wirtualna Polska, management board report, [2022](#)).

A significant piece of information signalling a turn towards technology was the transaction carried out by a subsidiary company of the Wirtualna Polska holding in 2022, which bought 100% of the shares in the company managing the Benchmark.pl technology service. It is one of the leading Internet portals for computers, new technologies, video games and electronic equipment. The transaction amounted to approximately PLN 14.1 million (WP Reklama, [2023](#)).

A popular project aimed at young audiences, which achieved market success, was the Vibez service launched in September 2020, using solutions known from social media applications, such as stories from Instagram or Snapchat. The website was developed in cooperation with Google as part of the Google Digital

News Initiative. It is the only publishing initiative of this kind in this part of Europe that has been qualified in the category of large projects (from EUR 300,000 to one million in funding) (WP Reklama, Vibez, [2023](#)).

A distinctive direction of development of Wirtualna Polska Holding in recent years has been e-tourism, using technology and economic convergence processes taking place between traditional tourism – in the context of tourist traffic management and the developing electronic form of regulating and managing tourist traffic, especially in combination with monetization related to the e-commerce market. In the third quarter of 2023, Wirtualna Polska Holding recorded higher revenues from tourism than from advertising for the first time in history (Wojtas, [2023](#)). In the second half of June 2021, Wirtualna Polska Media, a subsidiary of the Wirtualna Polska holding, bought 8.5% shares of the company Nocowanie.pl, gaining 93.5% of the capital and votes at the general meeting of the company (Wirtualne Media, August [2021](#)).

In 2022, the concern developed companies operating in the e-commerce market, taking over, i.a., the Sallas Group, which made it one of the largest tourist groups in the region of Central and Eastern Europe. In September 2022, Wirtualna Polska Holding S.A. bought Szallas Group, which operates the largest domestic travel portals in Hungary, the Czech Republic, Romania, Poland and Croatia. In November 2022, Wirtualna Polska Holding began integrating Nocowanie.pl with the acquired Noclegi.pl (Wojtas, [2023](#)).

Polska Press

The Polska Press Group is a media group whose ownership structure and internal organizational division have undergone frequent changes in recent years. On March 1, 2021, an agreement was signed for the sale of 100% of shares in Polska Press by HKM Beteiligungs GmbH to PKN Orlen S.A. (Słomski, [2021](#)). The research was conducted at a time when Orlen still had full control over Polska Press.

Polska Press, like other media companies, also experienced a decline in the sales of paper editions. In its 2022 financial statement, the group emphasized that it is in the process of business transformation: with falling revenues from 'old businesses' (printed press and printing), new types of business are being developed (a nationwide web portal and new business projects). In 2023, the company's management articulated the needs related to the transition from a press publishing house to a media and technology

company, with particular emphasis on developing an offer tailored to the end user's needs. Regarding the transformation process of Polska Press, in April 2022, CEO Tomasz Przybek spoke in one of the interviews. The statement was related to the employment of a new member of the management board of Polska Press Group, who was responsible for new technologies, including the construction of the announced new horizontal publisher portal. He pointed out that the transformation process has already begun, and the group will invest in both MarTech, AdTech and e-commerce (Wirtualne Media, April [2022](#)).

In the management board's report on the activities of Polska Press Sp. z o.o. for 2022, in the section devoted to achievements in the field of research and development, the company showed work on solutions that, when implemented, were to improve the efficiency of its operations: expansion of sales automation mechanisms and ad creation, implementation of additional functionalities in sales processes, development of analytical systems, expansion of the online services platform to increase efficiency, optimization of server infrastructure (Polska Press Sp. z o.o., management board report, [2022](#)).

Back in 2021, as part of its development work in the area of technology, Polska Press implemented IT services contributing to increasing the concern's efficiency, including expanding the online platform as part of Nasze Miasto in new Polish districts. It implemented [stronapodrozy.pl](#), [stronakuchni.pl](#), [stronazdrowia.pl](#), [gra.pl](#), [strefaedukacji.pl](#) websites and a new version of the [naszahistoria.pl](#) website. A new technological solution, 'photo repository,' was implemented in the area of online services and solutions integrating Polska Press systems with social media. The process of migrating server services (data centers) to the most important locations in Gdańsk and Warsaw was completed (Polska Press Sp. z o.o., management board report, [2021](#)).

Polska Press is the owner of the i.pl website, which has nationwide and international content in its tone. The portal, in addition to traditional text forms, publishes video podcasts and interactive reportages (i.pl, [2022](#)). The i.pl portal was launched on September 5, 2022 during the XXXI Economic Forum in Karpacz (Press.pl, [2023](#)). In the management board's report on the activities of Polska Press Sp. z o.o. for 2022, the company described that such a medium would allow Polska Press to implement the best solutions for all the group's websites, working on economies of scale. This creates a potential that affects the economic efficiency of the entire group (Polska

Press Sp. z o.o., management board report, [2022](#)). According to the assumptions, the horizontal portal was to actively support the directions included in the ORLEN Group's 2030 Strategy and its investments (Wirtualne Media, April 28 [2022](#)). In July 2023, the i.pl portal was visited by over 7 million users. A study conducted by Mediapanel indicated that the service has become one of the most popular in Poland, ahead of [wprost.pl](#) and [natemat.pl](#) (Wirtualne Media, September [2023](#)).

Polityka

Polityka Sp. z o.o. S.K.A., which is the publisher of the weekly and at the same time the oldest press title Polityka analyzed in this paper, is an example of a company with a permanent and well-established position on the Polish market for decades. In recent years, Polityka has expanded its press portfolio thanks to the acquisition of the monthly Wiedza i Życie and the magazine Świat Nauki from Prószyński Media. Based on their websites, it created a scientific platform Project Pulsar, with content available in a subscription model.

The weekly Polityka still constitutes the core of the entire publishing house, but it also had to succumb to the influence of digitization and the search for new business solutions, along with its digital counterpart and website. Nevertheless, in 2023, the weekly Polityka defended its first place in the ranking of opinion weekly sales (Zdzieborska, [2024](#)). The digital version of the company is gaining more and more importance in Polityka's development strategy, which was discussed in an in-depth interview with the director of the publishing department.

The editorial structure in Polityka takes into account the division into traditional and online editing. Not always does the content produced for the online version find its place in the traditional edition, while all content from the paper edition is published at the [Polityka.pl](#) and other available packages. According to the interlocutor, the process of convergence between the paper and online medium is smooth. In the past, the paper's editorial office was the dominant editorial office. Currently, the online editorial office, in the digital part of the [Polityka.pl](#), is dominant. The editor-in-chief of the online version supervises that information, comments and opinions are sent at the right time to editor Baczyński, who is responsible for the paper weekly.

A similar situation occurs in support activities – with the publishing department, which is led by the interlocutor, and the digital department, which

Joanna Chmielecka manages. This division also covers the entire area of the world of social media and the area related to editorial production for the needs of Polityka.pl and reworking what has already appeared in print, including Polityka and all special editions: Pomocnik Historyczny (Historical Helper), Poradnik Inteligentna (Intelligent's Guide), Poradnik Psychologiczny (Psychological Guide), as well as books.

The publication's basic version is on paper and has many more buyers. Its sales remain at the level of 80,000 copies, of which 24,000 are digital editions – the rest are printed editions, which are subject to the highest monetization. After preparing the newspaper for printing, it is transferred to the Internet and then packed in PDF, Epub or Mobi. These formats are then sent to all possible readers.

In the latest management board report on the company's operations analyzed by the researcher, as in previous years (since 2020), the publication indicates the digital direction of the company's development in the 'Expected development of the company' section. In 2023, the company planned to continue its publishing activities and strategy to maintain the market leader position among opinion weeklies. The management board also intended to continue or even increase its involvement in the development of the Internet, with particular emphasis on the intensification of digital sales of Polityka and the development of online products launched in 2022, such as podcasts or the popular science portal Pulsar. In addition, the management intended to continue investing in publishing projects, i.e. special editions obtaining grants (Polityka Sp. z o.o., management board report, 2022).

The Pulsar (projekt-pulsar.pl) project was launched in February 2022 as a popular science portal, created as a result of merging the websites of Świat Nauki and Wiedza i Życie (Wirtualne Media, February 2022). The website also publishes podcasts and digital editions of Świat Nauki and Wiedza i Życie. The digital part is dominated by young people under 40 years of age. At the same time, the share of older people in the digital part is higher than that of the young in the paper part. This means that the reader of 40 plus very often has the need to buy an additional paper version. This is especially true for readers 50 plus. Younger people (35 plus) choose the digital version. These recipients grew up in the digital world, which is completely different from the one in which the respondent's generation grew up. Readers who are 45 plus began their media adventure with one or two press titles, two TV stations and four

radio stations.

Agora Group

The Polish entertainment and media group Agora S.A. is one of the largest surveyed concerns. Agora's activities include cinema and film, digital and printed press, publishing, outdoor advertising, the Internet, radio, culture, education, entertainment and gastronomy. Narrowing down the scope of research in order to limit it to the subject of the media, it was carried out on the horizontal portal Gazeta.pl and at Radio Żłote Przeboje. It is worth noting that the company is the only one of the analyzed concerns to use the term 'convergence' in its reports on operations. Gazeta.pl is a medium appropriate for the digital area, while at Radio Żłote Przeboje the digital transformation process is underway thanks to, i.a. the creation of the position of digital transformation director at the Agora Radio Group in 2022 (Agora S.A., 2022). In Gazeta.pl, an in-depth interview was conducted with the person responsible for coordinating the video area, while the station's program director was on the radio.

Gazeta.pl creates content intended for younger audiences, eagerly watched by TikTok and YouTube users. From the expert's perspective, there have been big changes in the media over the past 3 years: during the pandemic, people got used to consuming videos and learning about the world in this way. Gazeta.pl already started promoting new video formats available as part of the interactive player in 2020, using its virtual showroom or Click2Shop options (a feature that allows you to add a product to the cart while watching a video) (Agora S.A., 2020). 'What has really changed the most is this: the three years during which people had to spend time at home got them used to observing the world and its different places through video consumption. It has also changed the outlook of the media because they have noticed that they can do their business not only in the studio,' explains the person responsible for this area at Gazeta.pl during the interview.

Regarding the trends accompanying the development of the media (including Agora), the interlocutor emphasizes the direction of media adaptation to specific users and their preferences. Interaction with the audience is increasing because of the policies of social media platforms. Audiences want to comment, react and influence what is happening in videos. At the same time, the importance of live broadcasts can be seen, including streams that respond to the described needs. The directions for the development of the Gazeta.pl portal are also indicated

in the analyzed documents. In February 2022, the management board of Agora S.A. announced that it had decided to expand the process of reviewing strategic options for the Agora Group's Internet operations, including the process of integrating the existing Press segment with the Gazeta.pl division into one business area of the Agora Group (Agora S.A., management board report, [2021](#)).

In the context of the portal's development plans, in the fourth quarter of 2022, Gazeta.pl and its services focused on developing offer for recipients and business partners. The Sport.pl team prepared a multi-channel plan to cover the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar, and the reports and comments of the three correspondents appeared regularly not only on Sport.pl and Gazeta.pl, but also on social media, including YouTube, Tik Tok, Instagram and Twitter. In October 2022 the journalistic cooperative Outriders, with the support of the Ukrayina.pl service and Ukrainian reporters, brought readers closer to the Gazeta.pl wartime realities of Ukrainian cities through a series of video reportages using VR/360 technology (Agora S.A., management board report, [2022](#)). In the radio segment, at the end of February 2023, Agora became the majority owner of Eurozet, increasing its potential in classical broadcasting and Internet broadcasting (Wirtualne Media, March [2023](#)).

Among the significant changes in the media industry over the last three years (2020-2023), the expert from Radio Żłote Przeboje mentions several important processes. According to him, the pandemic has led to the already established standard of the absence of the programme guest in the radio studio, which was not accepted years ago. Guests are already aware enough to realize that they do not need to visit the studio, but they still have a guaranteed presence in the media space. In the process, they have become more digitally educated and purchased equipment, partly due to the increasing demand to publish their social media content. It was the first change where the media and their audiences adapted to the new quality of broadcast conversations. Despite these changes, in the last three years, the Agora Radio Group recorded the highest growth rate of audience share among all broadcasters at over 21% (Wirtualne Media, February [2023](#)).

Software and hardware manufacturers for radio professionals have also come up with a number of interesting solutions, including an iPhone app for professional microphones. According to the expert, this clearly points in the direction of replacing studio solutions with technologies for mobile devices, including smartphones. With regard to the GRA's

technology development strategies, Agora and Radio ZET opted out of the DAB+ broadcasting competition in April 2022, deeming the technology obsolete and economically unjustified, while the position of director of Digital Transformation was created within the Agora Radio Group in July 2022. His remit included strategic development for GRA of the digital presence of its brands on the Internet and taking responsibility for all digital channel revenues and related products, including the TOK FM subscription offer (Agora S.A., [2022](#)). Since May 2023, a new research and analysis department has been in place within the structures of Eurozet Group, which was created by merging the research and analysis teams of Agora Radio Group and Eurozet (Wirtualne Media, April 27 [2023](#)).

In October 2021, the latest version of the TOK FM mobile application was integrated with Android Auto. This allows users of cars with this system to listen to the station's live programme and podcasts while out of range of traditional radio transmitters (Agora S.A., management board report, [2021](#)).

Conclusions

The convergence processes in each of the media concerns under investigation are, in vast majority, technological and economic. Ringier Axel Springer Polska and ZPR were able to obtain the most information from the broad spectrum of concern activities. Technological and economic convergence processes are used systemically in these companies, constituting the engine for the media portfolio and the data science hubs, representing an increasing percentage of the companies' activities and evolving into separate companies. The financial outlays towards building the advantage of technical facilities (production studios) are correlated with the strategic direction of content distribution and sales, focusing on video on demand (VOD). Like ZPR, RASP has aspirations to increase its market share as a media technology company. It is pursuing this goal by acquiring technology solutions, start-ups, and specialists to enhance Ringier Axel Springer Polska's ability to operate in this area.

In the case of large corporations, such as TVN Warner Bros. Discovery, the aspirations to expand their operations to include technological services are actually a necessity determined by the development of modern video technology. However, the concern was able to complement its offer with the potential of another media giant by creating a partnership programme with Ringier Axel Springer Polska.

Wirtualna Polska Holding is an example of a concern taking over many areas of the market (commerce, services) step by step, which potentially cannot interact with each other. However, WP Holding has created a number of technological solutions, e.g. in the area of leisure, which are able to integrate various industries into one conglomerate of interconnected services. The company clearly indicates its primary objective of maintaining its position as the largest Polish technology holding in the media and e-commerce sector.

The research confirmed the direction of digital services at Polska Press. The group's largest project was the i.pl portal launched in 2022 by its subsidiary company, PL24. Furthermore, in the management board's report for 2022, the concern describes that having such a medium will allow Polska Press to implement the best solutions to all the group's websites, working on economies of scale. The intention was to create the potential to influence the economic efficiency of the entire group. The portal was also to support the activities contained in the Orlen Group's Strategy 2030.

Research conducted at Polityka Sp. z o.o. S.K.A. indicated methods and tools for the use of convergence processes occurring at the border of the traditional publishing and online areas, which in the concern itself has already been incorporated into the basic and smallest elements of the organizational structure. In the management boards' reports on the company's activities, analyzed from the 2020 report onwards, in the section 'Anticipated development of the company', the publisher indicates the digital direction of the concern. It is pursuing a strategy that allows it to increase its involvement in the development of the Internet, with a particular focus on the intensification of sales of Digital Policy and the development of online products launched in 2022, such as podcasts and the popular science portal Pulsar.

In the Agora Group's surveyed products, one can most clearly read the use of convergence processes at Gazeta.pl. The portal, which creates, or even recently based on, video content, has processes in place to determine how content is prepared for a particular medium or audience. The development of mobile solutions and devices was touched upon while conducting research at Radio Złote Przeboje (Golden Hits). Like their guests, radio hosts are fully aware of the technological convergence that has gained momentum in recent years, mainly due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Potential guests are already equipped with good-quality studio equipment to

produce their own content, and editors have no choice but to exploit this phenomenon in their business.

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Courtesy Under Fire: A Structural and Contextual Analysis of Toxic Language in Online Gaming

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ABSTRACT

The paper delves into the phenomenon of toxic language in online gaming, a significant issue that reflects the broader challenges of online interaction between users. Despite online gaming being fairly new, considering other forms of games, its impact and popularity are constantly growing. As such a powerful activity, it naturally bears consequences – one of them being other players. This issue is widespread and does not pertain to a single region. The author establishes that patterns of such toxic language exist, basing the thesis on conducted research, whose main goal was to determine the grammatical structures and context in which toxicity manifests. By analyzing those patterns, the author establishes a foundation for understanding how toxic language manifests, providing a detailed examination of its linguistic structure. The observation also offers insight into the possible causes of increased toxicity.

Introduction¹

Historically, games have been one of the most popular forms of leisure activity, with their first known appearance tracking back to approximately the 17th century BCE. (Nogueira et al., 2020) Over time, the definition of activities that could be considered games has significantly expanded, and so has their artistic value. Due to the evolution of technology, one can speak of the division between physical and digital games, with the latter trying to assimilate the former. Seeing the success of video games, studios often decide to transfer their product onto the digital screen, an example of which could be the popular board game called “Monopoly.”

Online games are a solution for those who enjoy gaming and spending time with others. How does that differ from the games that require the physical presence of another participant? The first factor is accessibility – in terms of physical games; a player requires at least one person set on a similar goal or someone with basic knowledge of the planned activity. That does not apply to online gaming, which is only a matter of pressing one button and a few minutes. Considering the game’s technological state, the players’ communication is optimized to support verbal (text chat, voice chat) and nonverbal (e.g., built-in-game pings, graffiti) processes. Differences between the two forms of games can also be observed in the factors affecting potential injuries. Just as in the case of sports games, the player is exposed to some unwanted risks.

In general, the primary and foundational principle of games should be the entertainment of all parties involved. However, it is often defined by the character and emotional responses of the participant. Winning and losing is a matter of individual approach and, as such, is perceived differently. What happens when the “duel” is watched by other people? Historically, humanity has demonstrated a proclivity for engaging with polarizing and controversial spectacles, an example of which could have been seen in Ancient Rome, where sports games were based on brutality. Due to humankind’s evolution, those “games” are seen as highly repulsive, pernicious, and perilous activities. Take a moment to think of any sporting event streamed and happened until November 2024 that would be considered “most-streamed.” According to Netflix, it was their event in which “the Jake Paul vs Mike Tyson fight is the most-streamed sporting event ever, peaking at 65 million concurrent streams, with 38 million concurrent streams in the US” (Netflix, 2024). It is a boxing duel between a retired 58-year-old box star and a 29-year-old influencer. Naturally, the numbers could be even higher due to piracy (restreams). The information about the duel has sparked controversy among the users of a social media platform - X (formerly Twitter). The main arguments were mainly about the age of the former and the nature of the duel. In some comments, tension rose to the point where it would not have in a public debate. Such a phenomenon can also be observed in Poland, where freak show fights have been embedded in the minds of teenagers and

1. The article is based on research conducted as a part of the diploma thesis “My grandfather startles horses with such phrases” Toxic language in online games” completed under the Digital Communication field of study, which was defended on 19.07.2024 at the Faculty of Media and Social Communication of The University of Information Technology and Management in Rzeszow.

young adults in recent years. If information about sport-themed games causes such raw emotions on the internet, how does that correspond to people who participate in online gaming? Are there any parallels that can be drawn to the behaviour of online gamers? After all, both commenters and players use the same platform, which is based on anonymity to communicate. In addition to the privacy of data, online gamers invest a significant amount of their time (as opposed to posting a comment) and allocate their emotions to the current match. Such an issue could be catastrophic if a participant decided to stream their gaming sessions to a wider audience and lacked control of their behaviour, which could lead to establishing bad patterns for the viewers and making them cheer after humiliating another person. This phenomenon could have occurred in Ancient Rome.

The author of the article, having considerable experience in the online gaming environment, had decided to collect material filled with any manifestation of toxic language (excluding phrases that are undeniably linked to the sociolect of the studied group), defined as a form of communication characterized by the use of aggressive and offensive language with racist and vulgar connotations, the inclusion of threats and manipulation, verbal deceit, elements of psychological abuse, and hate speech (Mohan et al., 2017). It is used most often to displace the sender's negative emotions onto another participant in communication. Hence, the study's primary objective was to analyze communication among online gamers of selected games in the context of toxic language, including examination of used language, internal variation, level of linguistic accuracy, and identification of topics addressed by the senders. The author has also managed to categorize the content based on its level of toxicity.

Literature review

According to the report published by the Anti-Defamation League in June this year, "an estimated 83 million of the 110 million online multiplayer gamers in the U.S. were exposed to hate and harassment over the last six months. Three out of four young people (ages 10-17) experience harassment when playing video games" (ADL, 2024). Considering the fact that the study was conducted only in the U.S., it is logical to assume that the number of victims of

toxic language is much higher. Research conducted by Zeila et al. (2022) shows that 66% of surveyed Hungarians were exposed to and have encountered toxic behaviour from other players, which shows that the issue is not regional but global.

It is difficult to determine the number of so-called video gamers alone, not to mention the division between those dedicated solely to single-player games. The data differs in most studies; however, according to the article published by New Zoo (2023), "global player numbers will reach 3.38 billion, with emerging regions driving player growth", most of whom (1.79 billion) reside in Asia-Pacific, and are followed by Middle East & Africa (574 million), and Europe (335 million) (Statista, 2023). The data seems to differ from the report published by the European Commission from the same year, which states that "half of the European population (237 million users aged between 6-64 years) regularly play video games" (European Commission, 2023).

Naturally, with the growth of the player base, sales also pique. In 2024, the amount of income is estimated to reach 71.1 billion dollars. In regards to such a high flow of currency, it is fair to do anything possible to maintain the level. Keeping a player is one of the desirable things. In order to ensure that the player does not quit the game due to another player, the developers try to take action against toxicity. According to Dijkstra et al. (2024), there are five different approaches that were designed to deal with toxic behaviour – empowering, supporting, priming, sanctioning and detecting. Each system is based on a different strategy, but most focus only on reacting, while prevention should be equally desired.

In the case of the Polish language, according to sociolinguistic descriptions, the online branch of the language has numerous distinctive features, such as: "withdrawing from linearity and the casual nexus; lack of established authorial message; ellipticity and abbreviation of a statement; fusion of verbal and iconic codes; eclecticism of written and oral form; colloquialization and vulgarization of expressions; numerous neologisms and English borrowings; deviation from standards of correctness, especially distinguishable in cases of [...] orthography and punctuation" ² (Smoleń-Wawrzusiszyn, 2016).

When it comes to the English language, linguistic analysis of toxic behaviour has shown that

2. Originally in Polish: „odejście od linearności i uporządkowania przyczynowo-skutkowego; brak założonego przesłania odautorskiego; eliptyczność i skrótowość komunikatu; łączenie kodów werbalnych z ikonicznymi; elektyzm pisemności i oralności; kolokwializacja i wulgaryzacja wypowiedzi; liczne neologizmy i zapożyczenia anglojęzyczne; odejście od norm poprawnościowych, co jest widoczne zwłaszcza na poziomie grafii, ortografii i interpunkcji”

such players frequently employ offensive language, with distinct uni- and bi-grams serving as markers of their verbal aggression. The temporal patterns of these expressions highlight how toxicity escalates, particularly during high-stakes moments in a match. In consequence, this disrupts the dynamic between players, as it affects their emotional well-being (Kwak & Blackburn, 2014)

One of the conclusions from the study by Beres et al. (2021) was that online disinhibition is a significant contributor to toxicity. It is stated that players feel emboldened to use hostile language due to the anonymity provided by the internet. Over time, the normalization of toxic behaviour turns into a cycle from which the abused is more likely to replicate the abusers' actions. Many players rationalize abusive language as an intrinsic part of competitive gaming, describing it as "banter" to avoid the feeling of guilt

Characteristics of the gaming community

The gaming community is highly diversified, a trait which is owned by the wide range of thematic categories and types of video games available. Gamers do not fit into the traditional age brackets; the existence of educational games means that even the youngest can be included in this category. While the gaming community was initially heavily dominated by men, an increasing number of women are joining the ranks of gamers, and the difference in the preferred genre has already become a stereotype. Gamers come from diverse cultures, which are often mixed during matches. That can also lead to certain stereotypes, such as the perception of Russians as uncouth.

Gamers are not an affiliated community, but they often communicate between their subgroups with a third-party communicator, providing them with a server platform. Nevertheless, special events bring players together, such as esports tournaments, technology fairs, game awards, and cosplay gatherings. A frequent place visited on the internet by gamers are websites, which function as a streaming platform for content creators known as streamers. When it comes to game development, studios often create a forum dedicated to the game, where a person of interest can discuss the state of the game with the developers.

One of the most notable characteristics of the online gaming community is the tendency to "meme" about most of the things. It is worth noting that each of the subgroups has its own sociolect that is not a part of the general group, and as such, it can be at least controversial when compared. As an example of such mummification comes an acronym that

was developed in Poland – "JD" (Eng. Fuck Dis) spread by one streamer towards another, which was later massively popularized among the younger viewership. Rapidness is the trait directly linked with this community. A group of gamers is capable of both creating new trends as well as adapting to others.

Methods

The study was carried out through participant observation, which involved examining the gaming environment from within without disclosing the information about data collection. This approach was designed to minimize potential effects on the frequency or content of communication. The research aimed to address the following questions: What does the communication among players of selected online games look like in the context of toxic language?

The observation was carried out between 2017 and 2024, and as such, the study does not have ethical committee approval, as it was initiated by the author long before consideration of publication. The research was conducted with minimal communicative interaction by the researcher with other users, relying instead on the use of in-game communication tools (e.g., pings and voice commands) to preserve the authenticity of gameplay and information exchange. The hours of observation were not rigidly defined to identify patterns – or the lack thereof – in the frequency of toxic language depending on the time of the day.

The games included in the study were as follows: "Valorant", "League of Legends" and "Minecraft". The selection of these games was guided by the diversity of genres (Hero shooter, MOBA, Sandbox), age rating (PEGI 16, PEGI 12, PEGI 7), their cooperative and competitive potential, as well as popularity. The choice of matchmaking server was influenced by optimal ping, as this could also affect gameplay (Warsaw, EUNE, no official data but Polish-based).

The collected materials included screenshots, chat logs, and transcriptions of voice chat recordings. The transcriptions were written manually due to overlapping voices and accompanying in-game sounds, rendering the automated process ineffective. All collected materials were anonymized to protect participants' identities, ensuring compliance with ethical standards and the protection of personal data.

Findings

The author has collected over 300 cases of toxic language usage. The analysis of the material has led

to some general information about the toxic language.

Regarding gender, the vast majority of primary users (original initiators) of toxic language are men, accounting for 77% of all analyzed material (excluding cases where gender could not be determined through the player's nickname, voice, or use of personal forms). Among female users, the highest concentration of toxic language was observed in "Minecraft". However, the frequency of initiation of toxic language among women remains significantly lower compared to men.

The recipient of toxic language in the collected materials typically chooses one of four responses, with one option being exclusive to "Minecraft". The most common strategy is to respond by mirroring the toxic language (44%). The following approach is to completely ignore the communication (31%), while the least popular response involves replying politely (6%). The fourth strategy is to abstain from reacting, relying on the presence of moderation to handle the issue on behalf of the player (19%). However, none of the first three strategies effectively deter the sender from continuing to use toxic language.

The conducted study revealed an intriguing difference between the usage of toxic language in voice chat (20% of the research material) and text chat (80% of the research material). In the former, interventions by other players were marginal across the entire dataset (35%) and were only made by players who had previously communicated in a calm and non-confrontational tone. Non-engaged participants completely disconnected from team communication, likely out of fear of provoking the toxic individual, who could vocalize their opinions in an aggressive manner, which also extended to refraining from using in-game strategy notification systems. However, in "League of Legends," some non-active players engaged in communication (44%) and often responded humorously to such provocations. In all these games, the individuals targeted by toxic communication displayed a regression in their gameplay, sometimes intentionally making mistakes (while notifying others of this intention) in order to sabotage the match. On the other hand, the collected material from "Minecraft" exhibited a notable indifference to toxic language, as the game lacks a formal team structure, allowing players to maintain contact only with individuals they choose to interact with.

Based on the material obtained from "Valorant",

it can be concluded that users are discouraged from intervening in voice chat, as such actions often lead to the target shifting to the individual who steps in to defend the victim (86% of cases). In instances where intervention against the sender occurred, it was always undertaken by a single player rather than a group. These individuals were either placed at the top of the match's scoreboard or, if ranked lower, demonstrated a higher skill in operating toxic language.

Age also appears to influence the frequency of toxic language. Based on the analyzed material, which included messages indicating the user's age, manner of speaking, and voice characteristics, it can be inferred that the largest group employing this form of communication is adolescents. However, a comprehensive identification of this factor is impossible due to the differences in time spent when it comes to being in front of a computer between adolescents and adults.

The study did not reveal significant differences in the structural form of toxic language between voice chat and text chat. The only notable distinction is the limited variety of words used to describe an individual, potentially due to a lack of broader knowledge of the language employed by the user. This limitation often results in frequent repetition of the same words. Additionally, these interactions have a higher prevalence of negative references to skin color.

Structural Overview

In most research material, there is a complete lack of adherence to punctuation rules. In text-based chats, the lack of commas or even periods makes sentences take the form of dense streams of thoughts that may be incomprehensible for some (particularly for inexperienced users).

[...] you fucking dick go fuck *nickname* instead of sitting before computer you fat swine fuck until she hadn't left (spelling error) such fatty with dick of 1 mm³

This phenomenon also extends to voice chats, where the sender, attempting to convey their message, often fails to pause for breath and instead produces communicative noise. This behaviour may be connected to a desire to establish dominance by overwhelming the other user with a barrage of

3. Originally in Polish: „nie chuju jebany idz ruchac *nick* a nie przed kompem siedzisz gruba swinio ruchaj póki nie ruciła takiego gruba z kutasem 1 mm”

information. Communicative noise most commonly manifests as stuttering or filled pauses, characterized by prolonged repetition of a single sound (“uhhhh/emmm”). Another frequent strategy in speech formation involves the heavy use of vulgarisms, which either allows the speaker to construct their next thought or acts as a substitute for a lack of vocabulary.

Yo mamma ciamkała (alludes to sexual activity but also sound you make while eating, no direct translation) fuck yo daddy or yo daddy ciamkał *uhhh* the cunt of yo mamma when they made you while their condom fuck *uhhh* broke⁴

In the first example, the sender of the message made a few spelling errors in simple construction words. Those errors could not be even justified by their phonetic resemblance. Such mistakes may indicate fundamental educational deficiencies, which either correlate with the user’s age, or is a simple result of carelessness due to the rapid pace of gameplay. An intriguing perspective on this issue was detected in two other research materials from “Valorant” in which the users combined both text and voice chat. The absence of physiological voice mutation in the player’s speech, alongside their use of personal pronouns and a username partially containing a male name, allowed for inferences about their age and gender. The user showed no concern for the time spent composing his text messages, completely pausing his participation in gameplay yet still making basic mistakes. During oral communication, he also made phonetic errors. Most common issues with orthography in the gaming community include beginning sentences with lowercase letters, writing entire sentences in uppercase letters, and omitting Polish diacritical marks (e.g., “ą”, “ę”). There are errors that are widespread and not limited to toxic language.

Sometimes, players choose to replace Polish words with their English equivalents. This phenomenon is most commonly observed when users resort to insults related to genitalia. However, only in two out of twenty instances was a verb substituted in the imperative form. Interestingly, in such cases, based on the analyzed material, no spelling errors occur. One instance, however, stands out significantly. During

voice communication, the user opted to replace a Polish vulgar word filled with toxic connotations (“cwel”, which could be translated. as faggot) with an English word that sounds phonetically similar but lacks the negative aspect (“spell”).

Another case of an activity limited to voice chat is mimicking an accent to ridicule an individual after obtaining a sample of their voice. This was only directed at individuals whose accents could have been perceived as Middle Eastern. During the conversation, the sender constantly mocked the cultural elements of the receiver.

The categorization of toxicity

Three levels of toxic language can be established based on the variety of examples, their rhetoric, and potential harm. The first level involves the denigration of another user, the second pertains to discriminatory and racist elements. At the same time, the third consists of deliberate provocation aimed at emotional destabilization while also employing highly toxic expressions targeting values closest to the individual, such as family.

A linguistic unit present in all the materials is a vulgarism. Its intensity, frequency, and variety of epithets used as an addition are the defining characteristics of toxic language. Given their overwhelming presence, it can be argued that they serve as a foundation for insults and threats. Those insults can be categorized into six distinct groups. However, it is important to note that individual statements often combine elements from multiple categories.

Demeaning insults represent the mildest forms of verbal abuse in terms of content. Their usage is typically limited to disparaging player’s skill, intelligence or voice. The most common phrases in this category include: “twit” (pl. “pajac”), “dishwasher” (pl. “zmywara”), “pipe” (pl. “rura”) and “clown” (pl. “klaun”)

Offensive insults - one of the most common forms of toxic language primarily utilizes terms such as: “idiot” (pl. “idiota”), “moron” (pl. “debil”), “rag” (pl. “szmata”), “weak person” (also slur for homosexual male, pl. “ciota”) and “trash” (pl. “śmieć”). This category also includes verbs used in the imperative form such as “fuck off” (pl. “spierdalaj”) or “leave

4. Originally in Polish: „odejście od linearności i uporządkowania przyczynowo-skutkowego; brak założonego przesłania odautorskiego; eliptyczność i skrótowość komunikatu; łączenie kodów werbalnych z ikonicznymi; elektyzm pisemności i oralności; kolokwializacja i wulgaryzacja wypowiedzi; liczne neologizmy i zapożyczenia anglojęzyczne; odejście od norm poprawnościowych, co jest widoczne zwłaszcza na poziomie grafii, ortografii i interpunkcji”

me the fuck alone” (pl. “odpierdoli się”). A defining feature of this group is the brevity of the sentences, which lack additional descriptive elements.

Insults based on sexual themes – characterized by vocabulary related to genitalia or activities related to sex e.g. “dick” (pl. “chuj”), “cunt” (pl. “pizda”), “whore” (pl. “kurwa”). The content of such statements varies significantly, often addressing topics related to family or sexual orientation. This form of communication is also the most likely to include threats or harassment. Interestingly, when it comes solely to insults, no gender-specific differences can be observed—terms with either masculine or feminine connotations (which are common in the Polish language) are used regardless of the biological sex of the recipient. In a marginal number of cases within this specific category, intentional misgendering through the use of incorrect pronouns occurs, particularly in voice chat interactions.

Insults related to sexual orientation - in all but one of the analyzed materials, are directed at men by individuals presumed to be of the same gender. This category, aside from its discriminatory element, is characterized by a significant number of threats and imperative statements, over half of which resemble fantasy-like manner - excessively describing sexual acts. One possible factor influencing this trend could be the correlation between the dominance-inducing aspects of the game and the personality traits of the sender. In this way, the sender may seek to elevate their perceived value as an “alpha male” (a term often used by teenagers). Examples of demeaning insults in this category include terms such as “faggot” (pl. “cwel” or “pedał”), or “dyke” (pl. “lezba”).

Insults based on physiology, animals, diseases, and age - the most frequently used terms in the first subcategory are synonyms for excrement, expressed in various parts of speech, such as “crap-pants” (pl. “obsraniec”), “shit” (pl. “gówno”) or “pissed-on” (pl. “obszczany”). This category also includes animal-based comparisons, where species names are sometimes employed as insults to demean the recipient. The most common term in the Polish gaming community is “pies”, while in English, the equivalent “dog” is also popular, occasionally replaced by “rat”. This category also encompasses age-related insults, as they often overlap with physiological references. Examples include terms such as “brat” (pl. “gówniarz”) or “bed-wetter” (pl. “moczydupa”). Notably, references highlighting

old age are minimal, with such insults typically focusing instead on diseases, the most prevalent being “cancer” (pl. “rak”). Interestingly, the use of disease-related terms as insults also extends to younger individuals, especially when they struggle with conventional language norms. For instance, if a user attributes their mistakes to dysorthography, the most common retort from the original sender is the term “dysmózgia” (pseudo-diagnosis implying brain dysfunction). This category is marked by the highest degree of discriminatory content, targeting a broad range of social groups.

Insults directed at ethnicity and nationality - the most targeted ethnic group in this context are Jews. To a lesser extent, Russians and Ukrainians are also mentioned, with the latter group being explicitly targeted within the Polish gaming community, as indicated by the research material. Regardless of the region, individuals with darker skin tones are the most discriminated against in the context of racial slurs. This pattern of ethnic and racial insults highlights deeply rooted biases that manifest within gaming communities.

Context of toxic language

Conflicts between players, even when initially focused on criticizing skills, tend to escalate if not quickly resolved, ultimately converging on four thematic areas. The most prevalent theme is violence, which involves the verbalization of acts which the sender expresses a desire to commit. The contextual range of these threats includes assault, rape, or even the intent to commit murder. In every instance, interventions by other players, regardless of whether they use toxic language, only exacerbate the sender’s anger, provoking further hostile statements. The research material included one extreme case in which the sender, openly expressing their rage, issued threats without any moral restraint, even targeting children who might not have even been present in the game.

I promise that when something will break in me, I fucking go out, and I don’t give a fucking shit, whether someone has a family or some fucking life. I’ll eliminate everyone in order, no fucking exceptions, and with utmost importance, children fuck... Fucking...⁵

Another prominent theme involves family, which in the vast majority of cases is closely tied to sexual

5. Originally in Polish: „Obiecuję, że jak we mnie coś pęknie, kurwa wychodzę i w piździe mam jebanej, czy ktoś będzie miał rodzinę, czy kurwa życie jakieś. Niweluje każdego po kolei, bez kurwa wyjątków, a w szczególności najlepiej dzieci kurwa... jebane”

topics. The sender of toxic language most often references only the recipient's mother. Interestingly, in the analyzed materials, where the sender's gender was identifiable, female senders never mentioned the father. In the rare cases where fathers were referenced, the insults did not involve sexual themes but rather were focused on the father's absence from the recipient's life. This indicates a distinct pattern in how family-related insults are gendered and contextually framed.

The topic of gender arises exclusively when the recipient of the message is a woman who discloses this fact. Gender is not addressed in any way concerning male players. The conversational pattern focuses on degrading the role of women by invoking outdated stereotypes through comments such as "to dishes" (pl. "do garów") or "go take out the trash" (pl. "wynieś śmieci"). This behaviour reflects the belief that women are of lesser value and lack the skills to participate in gaming due to their gender. Furthermore, sexual harassment and persistent provocative remarks are common in such interactions, highlighting the toxic environment often faced by female players.

The least frequently discussed theme revolves around historical and political aspects. Among Polish players, this includes references to political affiliations, accusations of "leftist propaganda," and religious elements, particularly involving the late Polish Pope. On servers outside Poland, topics such as World War II, Nazi concentration camps, and slavery are occasionally brought up. A temporary surge in the popularity of these themes occurred on February 24, 2022, during the Russian invasion of Ukraine. In these instances, the intended target of the toxic language was not another player but Vladimir Putin. Other players supported and approved this behaviour, reflecting a collective sentiment rather than individual animosity.

Triggers of toxic language

The usage of toxic language can be categorized into six common patterns. Understanding these scenarios and their underlying factors is crucial for developing effective strategies to prevent the proliferation of toxic behaviour in gaming environments.

The gameplay failures category includes all situations where gameplay outcomes are unfavourable for the sender, particularly in matches perceived as a lost cause. An unhealthy approach to competition and self-imposed pressure is a significant factor amplifying negative feelings. Players at the top of the leaderboard are likelier to use toxic language than those with poorer performance. Mistakes made

by teammates or perceived incompetence further provoke emotional outbursts from these individuals.

Creating chaos and toxic behaviour in this pattern stems from a desire to create disorder, often out of boredom or for amusement. This type is most prevalent in "Minecraft", where motivations might include the desire to disrupt servers disliked by the player, often tied to competitive dynamics between servers. In these scenarios, moderators are frequently targeted. This behaviour tends to persist until the sender perceives it as pointless. Players displaying such tendencies are commonly referred to as "trolls" within the community.

Sexual harassment is a category that can manifest in three forms: (1) targeted by gender - this typically begins when a player discloses their gender or is deemed attractive based on voice chat interactions. In Minecraft, gender identification may occur through the use of specific grammatical forms. Initially, this involves subtle sexual innuendos that later escalate into explicit toxic comments if met with resistance; (2) perception of weakness - male players perceived as weak, feminine, or exhibiting unusual communication styles are targeted with direct toxic language, bypassing subtle innuendos. This is the most frequently observed form out of three; (3) entertainment-driven harassment - this subtype ties into the chaos-creating pattern, with harassment conducted purely for amusement.

Unfairness caused by game errors or malicious actions by other players is another significant factor contributing to the increased use of toxic language. Frustration intensifies when a player perceives they have performed well, but the system fails to accurately reflect their efforts (e.g., due to server lag). This emotion fosters negative feelings toward the gameplay, leading to irritability in the affected player. A critical trigger in such cases is provocation through comments about the player's skills. The second element—malicious actions by other players—is predominantly observed in "Minecraft", where there is a real risk of such behaviour. Examples of malicious actions include the destruction of player structures, theft of items, and intentional sabotage, such as excluding a player from certain game elements. In both scenarios, the targets of toxic language are those perceived as directly responsible for the deterioration of the victim's gameplay experience.

Toxic language also manifests in ideological discussions. In most cases, it is not directed at other users but instead used to express opinions that discriminate against specific social groups, political parties, or politicians affiliated with those groups. In

rare cases, when discussions involve extremist views, the target of toxic language may include individuals participating in the conversation. This suggests that toxic behaviour in such contexts is often a by-product of expressing deeply entrenched biases or hostility toward opposing viewpoints.

An interesting situation involves players who openly declare being under the influence of alcohol. Based on the research material, these individuals do not exhibit tendencies to use toxic language unless encouraged by other players. This dynamic often includes an element of playfulness, as recipients appear to consent to consciously and even encourage further exchanges in a similar tone. Participants deliberately accept communication in such a style within this type of interaction. Paradoxically, once the game concludes, the same players who engaged in the exchange often display friendliness and exchange pleasantries, showing goodwill toward one another in subsequent games.

It is also worth noting that users of toxic language often share links to their social media profiles (e.g., Twitch, TikTok, or Instagram), where they stream gameplay, post clips from their matches, or share personal photos. This behaviour suggests that one of the potential motivations driving toxicity may be a desire to gain popularity and attract attention.

Conclusion

Toxic language in online games is widespread and is characterized by offensive comments, vulgarisms, name-calling, mockery, sarcasm, and various forms of humiliation. It often includes elements of harassment, racism, threats of different kinds, and discrimination. In the gaming community, toxic language exhibits significant variation across games. For example, in “Minecraft”, communication tends to stand out for its creativity. “League of Legends” takes the form of a mix of insults, and in “Valorant”, it is the most personal. The linguistic correctness of toxic communication often deviates significantly from standard norms, disregarding established language rules entirely. The communication between players suffers due to a lack of effective measures to combat toxicity. Interventions by other players often expose them to further verbal attacks, providing the aggressor with even more opportunities for manoeuvring. Research has shown that despite security measures developers implement, toxic language remains highly prevalent in gaming communities. Current methods of addressing this issue are poorly adapted to contemporary trends, rendering them ineffective in the prevention of toxic behaviour. Tools and algorithms designed to combat

toxicity often fail to detect, react and adapt to the nuanced ways in which toxicity can manifest. As Akbulut et al. (2023) argued, efforts must be made to combine real-time detection with cultural sensitivity to address the specific contexts in which toxic language occurs, as it only diminishes the community and creates a dangerous precedence.

The thematic breadth of toxic language has the potential to affect even the most resilient individuals emotionally. A game, as a source of entertainment combined with an element of competition, should not decrease self-esteem through humiliation, stress, feelings of shame, the resurfacing of potential traumas due to comments, isolation from the community, or a sense of threat. The prevalence of toxic language yields no positive outcomes, even for the sender, unless their sole intention is provocation. When using toxic language to express criticism it results only in lowered team morale, reduced cooperation among participants, and a lack of willingness to continue participating in the match or game.


Game culture plays a critical role in the gaming community, as it influences the perception of the product itself. Mentions of other gaming communities by players help shape opinions that remain with the recipient until they are personally verified. This demonstrates the far-reaching impact of toxic language and behaviour, not just within a single game but also on the reputation and perception of the gaming ecosystem as a whole, which, in comparison to other forms of games, is fairly new to the market and can be wrongly judged.

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Synergy of corporate and personal branding: The example of Stal Mielec FC and Jacek Klimek

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personal branding, corporate branding, image management, media studies

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to verify the synergy effect between the personal brand of an organization's leader and the corporate brand in the context of communication activities and a political campaign. The example of Jacek Klimek, the president of the football club Stal Mielec and a candidate for mayor of Mielec, was used. The impact of his branding activities on the perception of the corporate brand and the use of the club's image in constructing a political narrative was discussed. The study used an analysis of several hundred press publications from the pre-election campaign period, taking into account visual and thematic elements. The results indicate the important role of synergy in enhancing the image of both the leader and the organization while highlighting the need for careful image management in the political context. The article contributes to the literature on social communication and media sciences by providing empirical findings on the integration of personal and corporate brands.

Introduction

Building a corporate and personal brand is a challenge that requires harmonizing the expectations of companies, leaders and audiences. In the age of digitalization and dynamic changes in marketing communications, brand management takes on a new dimension. The globalization of markets, the intensification of competition and the growing importance of social media are forcing organizations and leaders to redefine branding strategies constantly. Understanding how corporate and personal brands can support each other and reinforce their value in the eyes of consumers, business partners, and other stakeholders is becoming a key aspect of the field.

Although the literature contains numerous analyses of the effectiveness of corporate branding efforts, relatively little attention has been paid to the synergies between personal and corporate brands. These relationships, while intuitively obvious, are complex and multidimensional. Organizational leaders in public and media roles significantly impact the perception of the organization they represent. At the same time, their personal actions, values and reputation can both support and undermine the corporate brand. Contemporary research indicates that the synergy between personal and corporate brands can become a key success factor, but its effective use requires proper management and an understanding of interaction mechanisms.

The topic remains almost unexplored in Polish literature, indicating a significant research gap. In the context of the growing interest in branding, both in academia and in practice, there is a need for more

detailed analyses and case studies that demonstrate how the interaction of a leader's personal brand and a corporate brand can shape their shared values. In the face of changing societal and cultural expectations, incorporating these relationships into branding strategies is becoming not only a need but also a necessity.

The article attempts to fill this gap by analyzing the relationship between personal and corporate brands, using the example of the football club Stal Mielec and its president, Jacek Klimek. Stal Mielec, one of Poland's most recognizable sports brands, is distinguished by its rich history and strong roots in the local community. In turn, Jacek Klimek, as the organization's leader and a public figure, has become the club's ambassador, building its image locally and nationally. This analysis provides an understanding of how the mutual support of the two brands - corporate and personal - can lead to an increase in their value, as well as the challenges of managing this relationship.

The article aims not only to introduce the theoretical aspects of the synergy between personal and corporate branding but also to show the practical implications of this phenomenon in the context of the Polish sports market. Thus, this work can inspire further research and development of branding strategies in other sectors of the economy.

Overview of definitions

Branding is defined ambiguously in the literature of the topic area. American Marketing Association (AMA) defines branding as „a tool to identify a particular object and differentiate it from competitors”, noting aspects such as creating a unique identity, value and

perception that distinguishes it from competitors. For almost 30 years, there has been a shift in terminology and a move from ‚marketing’ to the dominant use of ‚branding’. Some authors have sought to distinguish ‚branding’ from ‚marketing’. Historically, marketing is thought to have preceded the development of branding. On the other hand, T. Sammut-Bonici (2003) points out that the aim of branding strategies is to create brands that are different from the competition, thereby reducing the number of substitutes in the market. When high brand value is achieved through brand differentiation, the price elasticity of demand becomes low, allowing the company to raise its price and improve profitability.

Other definitions also emphasize that a brand can be defined as a set of tangible and intangible attributes designed to create awareness and identity and build the reputation of a product, service, person, place or organization. The holistic perspective of branding as a long-term strategy encompasses a broad set of activities, from product innovation to marketing communications. Branding means more than just giving a name and signalling to the outside world that such a product or service has been stamped with an organization’s mark and imprint. Branding is about transforming product categories; it requires a long-term corporate commitment and a high level of resources and skills (Kapferer, 2004).

Moreover, branding is defined extremely ambiguously in literature due to the diversity of research perspectives and practical applications of the concept. American Marketing Association (AMA) defines branding as „a tool to identify a specific object and differentiate it from competitors”, noting its primary functions: creating a unique identity, building value and shaping perceptions that distinguish the brand in the eyes of consumers. This definition points to the essence of branding as a process to ensure recognition and competitiveness in a dynamically changing market.

For almost 30 years, there has been an evolution in the terminology associated with branding. The difference between ‚marketing’ and ‚branding’ is increasingly recognized in literature and business practice. Marketing, which is the historical foundation of promotional activities, focuses on creating and delivering value to consumers. On the other hand, branding focuses on the long-term construction of brand identity, which is a key element of competitive strategy. As T. Sammut-Bonici (2003) points out, branding seeks to create unique and difficult-to-replace brands, thus reducing the number of available substitutes in the market. High brand value, achieved

through brand differentiation, leads to lower price elasticity of demand. This allows companies to gain greater control over the price of their products, resulting in increased profitability.

In other words, branding is a complex set of activities that build brand awareness, identity, and reputation. According to the holistic approach, a brand is a system of interrelated tangible (e.g. logos, products) and intangible (e.g. values, emotions) elements that together create a unique audience experience. Kapferer (2004) emphasizes that branding means more than just giving a name and differentiating a product from the competition - it represents a process of transforming a product category, requiring a long-term commitment from the organization. Successful branding requires adequate resources and the ability to strategically plan and implement activities consistent with the organization’s mission and values.

Contemporary literature also emphasizes the diversity of approaches to branding depending on the context to which it relates. Hence, approaches such as:

- Employer branding focuses on building an organization’s image as an attractive employer. Research indicates that a strong employer brand attracts the best candidates and increases employee engagement (Backhaus and Tikoo, 2004).
- Corporate branding focuses on shaping the image of the organization as a whole. In this view, the corporate brand reflects the company’s values, mission and strategy, influencing how customers, business partners and the community (Hatch and Schultz, 2001) perceive it.
- Personal branding is related to the branding of an individual who seeks to highlight their unique qualities, competencies and values. Literature indicates that personal branding is particularly relevant in the context of organizational leaders, as their actions and reputation can influence perceptions of the organization as a whole (Zarkada, 2012).

Corporate branding

According to Hatch and Schultz (2001), corporate branding is based on the synergy of three key elements: strategic vision, organizational culture and corporate image. The strategic vision reflects the main goals and aspirations of the organization, which should be clearly defined and communicated both internally and externally. On the other hand, organizational culture encompasses the core values that define how the organization operates, creating

a unique identity code for its members. Corporate image refers to the brand's perception by external stakeholders such as customers, investors or business partners. De Chernatony (1999) elaborates on this concept, suggesting that effective corporate branding requires minimizing the gap between brand identity and brand reputation. The brand identity encompasses internal values and assumptions, while reputation reflects how the external environment perceives the brand. Bridging this gap allows organizations to build authenticity, which becomes a key element of long-term corporate strategy. Kapferer (1995) emphasizes that the corporate brand acts as an 'invisible contract' between the organization and its stakeholders. Clarity of vision, credibility and authenticity are key elements that influence an organization's ability to build long-term trust. The functions of corporate branding also include enhancing competitive positioning, building added value and increasing customer loyalty. Kapferer points out that consistency of branding activities with an organization's mission and values is fundamental to building a relationship of trust.

The literature on the topic indicated the importance of internal brand resources, such as employees and organizational culture, in the process of building a coherent brand identity. Backhaus and Tikoo (2004) emphasize that the involvement of employees in realizing the organization's vision is crucial for successful corporate brand management. Employer branding, which is one of the offshoots of corporate branding, plays an important role here, building a bond between employees and the organization's brand, which translates into consistency in external communication.

Contemporary approaches to corporate branding consider developments in technology and globalization, which are changing how we communicate with stakeholders. Digitalization allows organizations to communicate more directly and interactively while raising brand transparency and authenticity expectations.

Personal branding

Personal branding has gained prominence in recent decades as a key tool for leaders, entrepreneurs, and professionals to build their visibility and authenticity. According to Zarkady (2012), personal branding involves the use of marketing strategies by an individual to highlight their unique qualities, competencies and values. Unlike traditional branding, which focuses on products or services, personal branding focuses on the individual as a carrier of values and competencies.

Scheidt and co-authors (2018) define personal branding as the process of long-term creation, maintenance and development of a 'human brand' (brand). They emphasize that personal branding is crucial in building trust in a market environment. Leaders who manage their image effectively can become ambassadors of the values of the organization they represent, enhancing its reputation and credibility.

The key elements of personal branding are consistency in communication, authenticity and relationship management skills. Rampersad (2009) points out that effective personal branding requires conscious planning, which includes identifying goals, building a unique image and using digital platforms effectively. Social media, such as LinkedIn, Twitter and Instagram, have become key tools in the personal branding process, enabling leaders to reach a wide audience.

The topic literature indicates that personal branding plays a particular role in environments with high public visibility, such as the sports sector, entertainment or politics. In these contexts, leaders often become the faces of the organizations they represent; thus, they must skillfully combine personal values with organizational values.

Relationship between corporate and personal branding

The synergy between corporate and personal brands is an important area of research in the marketing literature, particularly in the context of dynamic changes in the business environment and the increasing role of organizational leaders. Authors such as Ind and Watt (2005) point out that organizational leaders act as corporate brand ambassadors and shape the corporate brand image through their actions, attitudes and values. Their authenticity, competence and ability to build relationships with stakeholders are crucial in enhancing the corporate brand identity.

The synergy process between a leader's brand and the organization's brand is based on the mutual reinforcement of the values of both entities. A strong leader's personal brand can enhance the organization's prestige by attracting customers, business partners and talented employees. At the same time, a corporate brand can provide a foundation for building a leader's credibility, especially if the organization enjoys an established market position. Examples of such relationships are particularly evident in the sports sector, where club presidents, coaches or even players become the 'face' of the organization, creating its

image in the eyes of fans and the media.

The literature on the analyzed topic points to a number of benefits of combining a leader's personal brand with a corporate brand. Firstly, leaders who are corporate brand ambassadors contribute to the credibility and authenticity of the corporate brand. Research by Scheidt and co-authors (2018) shows that the interplay between a personal brand and a corporate brand can lead to an 'endorsement' effect, in which the two brands reinforce each other's perception in the eyes of stakeholders. For example, a highly respected leader can attract an organization's media and consumer attention, resulting in a better perception of its products and services. Secondly, a combination of both types of branding can increase customer and business partner loyalty. Leaders who identify with the organization's values and consistently communicate them become a source of inspiration and trust. Their presence in the media and active participation in the event industry build positive associations with the corporate brand, which consequently contributes to its lasting rooting in the minds of audiences.

Despite its many benefits, the interpenetration of personal and corporate branding also presents significant challenges. De Chernatony (1999) points out that over-identifying the corporate brand with the leader can increase reputational risk. In the event of a crisis, negative information about the leader can quickly spill over to the corporate brand, reducing its credibility and market value. We see examples of this in situations where leaders are embroiled in scandals or make controversial decisions that are not in line with the organization's values. An additional challenge is to balance the autonomy of the leader's personal brand with its connection to the corporate brand. The literature of the subject area indicates that too much subordination of the personal brand to corporate goals can limit a leader's creativity and ability to build his or her own authenticity. Conversely, too much separation between the two brands can lead to a blurring of the corporate identity and a loss of consistency in marketing communications.

The relationship between personal and corporate brands is particularly evident in sectors with high media visibility, such as sports, fashion, or technology. In the sports sector, leaders, such as club presidents or coaches, are often seen as brand ambassadors, and their actions can contribute to enhancing the organization's positive image. For example, a club's sporting success is often attributed to the leaders' effective management, which builds their local and global reputations. However, the sector context

can also influence the specificity of brand synergy challenges. In sectors with intense media competition, such as the entertainment industry or politics, leaders need to be particularly careful about how they present their personal brand to avoid unintended conflicts with the organization's values.

Research methodology

The research subject was the analysis of synergies between the Stal Mielec club's corporate brand and its president's personal brand, Jacek Klimek, in the particular context of his candidacy for a mayor of Mielec. The research focused on the pre-election campaign period when Jacek Klimek's personal branding activities could be linked to the club's image.

The corporate brand of Stal Mielec

Stal Mielec, as a football club with a rich tradition and roots in the local community, was a significant element of Jacek Klimek's image. The research included an analysis of the club's media communication, with a particular focus on mentions that could indicate its use in activities supporting the president's candidacy. The corporate brand was examined in the context of its potential impact on increasing the credibility and recognition of Jacek Klimek as a political candidate.

Jacek Klimek's personal brand

As a club leader and public figure, Jacek Klimek used a personal branding strategy in his sporting and political activities. The analysis focused on publications appearing in the electronic media, which indicated the use of his achievements in managing Stal Mielec to build the image of an effective leader during the election campaign.

The aim of the research was to identify and analyze the interplay between Jacek Klimek's personal brand and the corporate brand of Stal Mielec during the pre-election campaign period. Key research questions are as follows:

- Has the corporate brand of Stal Mielec been used, and if so, to what extent in activities supporting Jacek Klimek's candidacy for mayor of Mielec?
- How has Jacek Klimek's personal brand affected the perception of the club in the electronic media?
- What visual and communication elements were used most frequently in the materials analyzed?

The Brand24 system was used to analyze the material, enabling the monitoring and categorizing of media content during the campaign period. The tool allowed for:

- Identification of media mentions related to Jacek Klimek and Stal Mielec.
- Analysis of publication sentiment (positive, neutral, negative).
- Tracking the occurrence of visual elements such as photos of the chairperson, the club logo and photographs related to sporting events.

Publications appearing in electronic media, such as news portals, social media and blogs, were examined between 12 February and 6 April 2024. These materials included content related to both the club's activities and Jacek Klimek's activity as a candidate for mayor of Mielec. Key search keywords were „Jacek Klimek”, „Stal Mielec”, „election campaign”, and „ the president of Mielec”. The analysis was based on two approaches: quantitative and qualitative.

Quantitative analysis, which included:

- Counting the number of publications mentioning Jacek Klimek and the club Stal Mielec.
- Categorization of content by topic (e.g. sporting successes, managerial activities, election campaign).
- Assessment of the frequency of visual elements (photos of the president, club logo, team photos).

Qualitative analysis, which included:

- An examination of the context in which Jacek Klimek's actions were mentioned, e.g. whether they referred to his managerial successes at the club or to political activities.
- Analysis of the rhetoric and narrative in publications to identify possible links between the president's image and the election campaign.
- Identification of potential strategies for using the club brand to promote the candidate.

The research period from 12 February to 6 April 2024 was selected to capture the intense pre-election campaign phase. The material analyzed included both publications related to the club's activities and those directly relating to the candidacy of Jacek Klimek. The chosen period allowed for the examination of communication patterns and their evolution in the time leading up to the election.

Research limitations included the following:

- Scope of data: The research relied on publicly available electronic publications, which may limit

the full picture of the marketing and communication activities of the entities surveyed.

- Local context: The analysis focused on Mielec and its surroundings, which may affect the limited generalizability of the results to other regions or contexts.
- Short research period: the election campaign covered a relatively short period of time, which may not reflect the long-term impact of brand synergies.

Findings

Based on an analysis of 140 press publications about the president of Stal Mielec, the following key subject areas can be distinguished:

- **Presence of the president in the media (99 publications):** The largest number of publications (71% of the total) referred to the mention of Jacek Klimek as the club president. This result indicates the central role he plays in Stal Mielec's media communication. The high number of publications may be the result of the president's active presence in the media and the conscious use of his image to build the club's corporate brand.

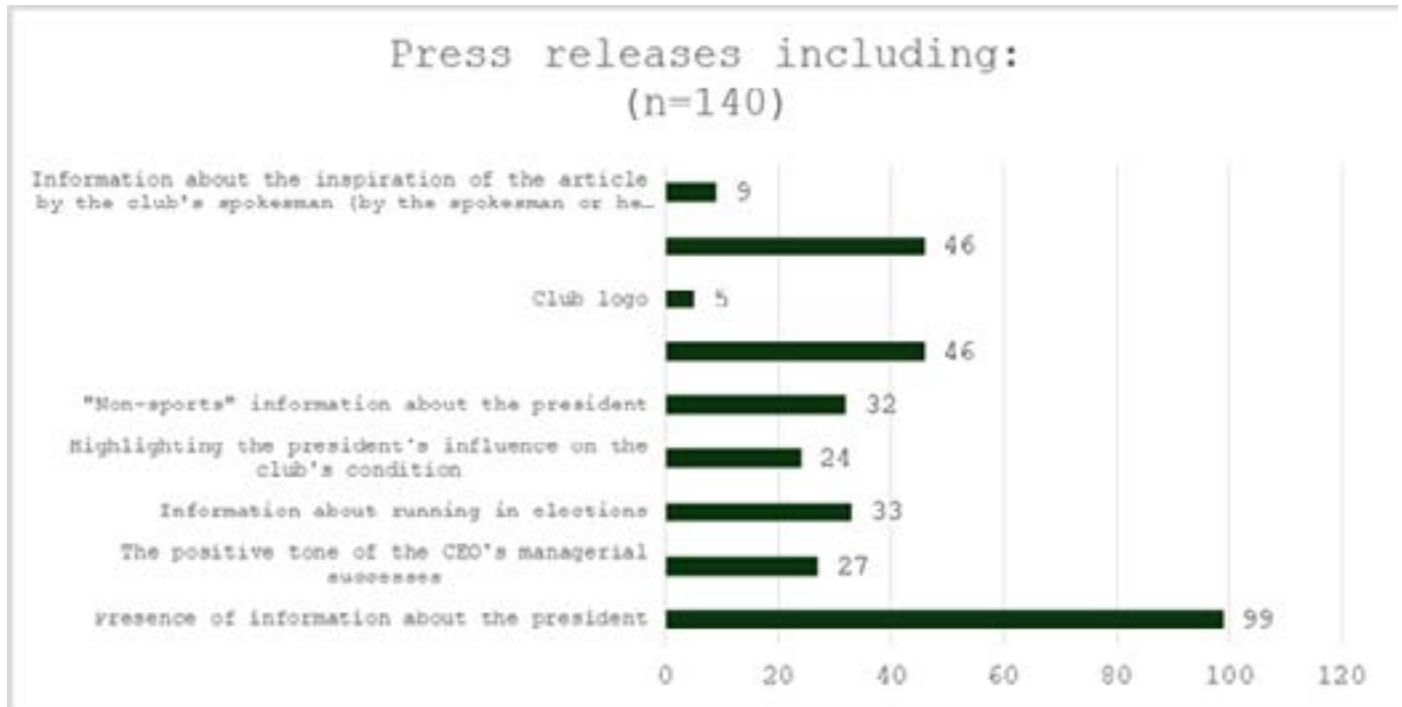
- **CEO's managerial successes (27 publications):** The number of articles focusing on Jacek Klimek's managerial successes represents 19%. This result suggests that the media recognize his management activities as important, highlighting his impact on the club's development. This may indicate a skilful use of the organizational success narrative in both sporting and managerial contexts.

- **Content not directly related to sport (46 publications):** More than 32% of the publications covered non-sports topics, such as Jacek Klimek's social activities. This may be due to his local activity, which allows him to build a positive image in the urban environment, which is important in the context of his candidacy for mayor of Mielec.

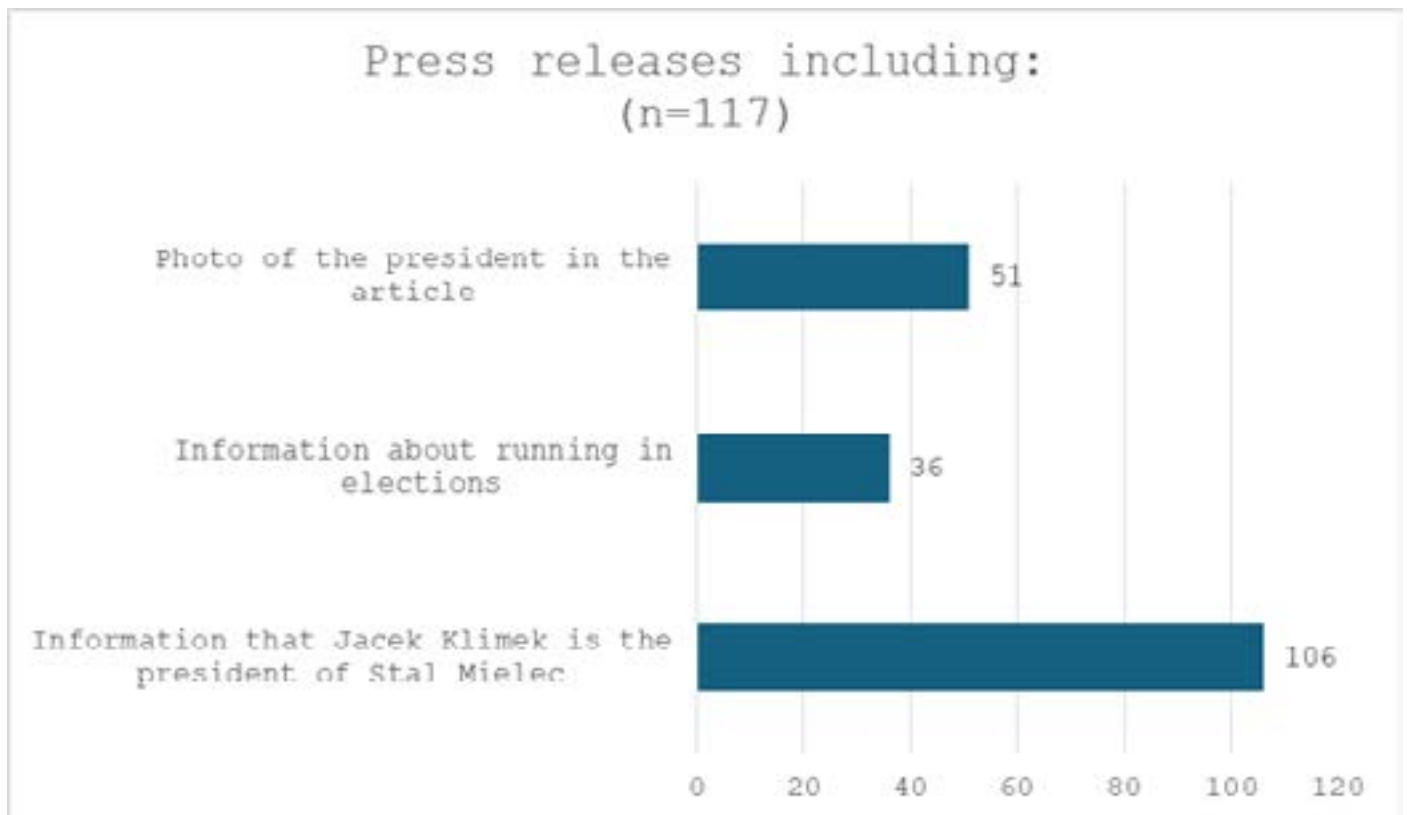
- **Visual elements:** The club's logo appeared in 46 publications, suggesting that the corporate brand of Stal Mielec was strongly featured in the context of mentions of the president. At the same time, images relating to the club only appeared in 9 articles, which may indicate that the club's visual representations were less important than the CEO's personal image. Figures 1 and 2 show the results obtained.

Figure 1:

Content of press releases concerning Stal Mielec FC

**Figure 2:**

Content of press releases on Jacek Klimek



The following statistics were recorded for publications about Jacek Klimek (117 publications):

- **Mentions of the function of the president (106 publications):** The most often recurring theme in the analyzed materials was the function of Jacek Klimek as the president of the club. The

high number (90.6% of publications) indicates that his role as leader of the organization was the main point of reference in the media. This may be due to the deliberate prominence of his position in the club's communication activities, highlighting his importance as a brand ambassador.

- **Political context (36 publications):**

The moderate number of articles referring to Jacek Klimek's pre-election campaign (30.7% of publications) suggests that the media did not fully focus on his political activities. This may be due to a deliberate strategy to limit political content in media communications to avoid controversy or conflict with the club's corporate brand value.

- **Visual elements:** Photos of Jacek Klimek appeared in 51 publications (43.6% of the total), highlighting the importance of the visual representation of the president in building his image. This may indicate that Jacek Klimek's personal image was used as a key element in branding activities, both in a sporting and political context.

The analysis strongly suggested that Jacek Klimek was perceived primarily as the president of the sports club Stal Mielec. The results suggest that his personal brand was deliberately linked to the club's corporate brand, which may have been a strategy to reinforce both entities' images mutually.

The small number of publications on Jacek Klimek's candidacy for mayor of Mielec indicates a possible strategy to avoid excessive entanglement of the club in political issues. Such a practice might have been aimed at maintaining image neutrality, minimizing the risk of conflicts or divisions in public perception.

The high number of publications containing the club's logo and photos of the president underlines the importance of visual aspects in communication. The results suggest that the image of Jacek Klimek as a leader was a key element in building credibility and trust, especially in the local environment.

A significant number of publications relating to Jacek Klimek's social activities have been identified. This indicates the use of a holistic approach to building his image, encompassing both sporting activities and local social involvement. The results suggest that this strategy was aimed at positively shaping the image of the candidate for mayor of Mielec in the eyes of the local community.

The findings point to a well-thought-out communication strategy based on combining personal and corporate branding, avoiding political connotations in the context of the club and using visual and social aspects in image building.

The results presented in Figures 1 and 2 indicate a significant synergy between Jacek Klimek's personal brand and the corporate brand of Stal Mielec. The club's brand was consistently used as a foundation in building the CEO's image, both in the sporting and social context. At the same time, Jacek Klimek's

personal branding activities strengthened the image of Stal Mielec as an organization managed by an effective leader.

These findings indicate that branding strategies were consciously integrated during the period under study, allowing the two brands to reinforce each other's values. However, the limited link between political activities and the club's media communication may suggest that efforts were made to avoid potential controversies that could negatively affect the corporate image.

The analysis of the results makes it possible to formulate answers to three key research questions about the relationship between Jacek Klimek's personal brand and the corporate brand of Stal Mielec:

- How does Jacek Klimek's personal brand influence the perception of the Stal Mielec brand? The results indicate that Jacek Klimek's personal brand, which is an integral part of the club's communication activities, significantly strengthens the image of Stal Mielec as a professionally managed organization. The high number of publications highlighting his role as the president and his managerial successes indicates that audiences perceive the club through the prism of the leader's competence. Jacek Klimek's strong media presence has built up an image of the club as

a dynamic and credible institution, which in turn could increase its attractiveness in the eyes of business partners and the local community.

- How does the club's corporate brand support the president's personal branding activities? The corporate brand of Stal Mielec was effectively used as a platform to reinforce the narrative about Jacek Klimek as a leader and political candidate. The prominence of the club's logo in 46 publications and the use of the club's sporting and organizational successes in the media proves that the corporate brand was an important element in the CEO's credibility-building strategy. In this way, the sports club promoted its values and supported the leader's personal branding activities in a manner consistent with the corporate identity.

- What are the key visual and communication elements used in the synergy of the two brands?

Key visual elements included images of Jacek Klimek (51 publications) and the logo of Stal Mielec (46 publications). Their presence indicates the importance of visual representations in building associations between personal and corporate brands. At the same time, content related to the CEO's social activities exemplified a holistic approach to communication, integrating the club's values with local activities. These elements supported the

coherence of the narrative, building a positive image of both the president and the club.

The results indicate that the synergy between the two brands was deliberately designed, and its effects reflect the conscious image management of both Jacek Klimek and Stal Mielec.

Discussion

The results of the research confirm the key role of the synergy between Jacek Klimek's personal brand and the corporate brand of the Stal Mielec club, especially during the pre-election campaign period. Ghodeswar (2008) emphasizes that a corporate brand, in order to be effective, should be based on the distinct identity of a leader who embodies the values and mission of the organization. In the case of Stal Mielec, the function of the CEO performed by Jacek Klimek was the dominant element of the media narrative - as many as 71% of publications referred to his role at the club. This result confirms that the leader's brand was a key element in the club's corporate communications while also underpinning his political campaign activities.

Jacek Klimek's extensive media presence can be explained by his activity in both sporting and social contexts. According to Kapferer's (1995) theory, a corporate brand, supported by a recognizable leader, can gain authenticity and increase its value in the eyes of stakeholders. In the case analyzed, Jacek Klimek's managerial successes at the club, highlighted in 27 publications, became an important element in building his image as an effective leader, which was also important in the context of his candidacy for mayor of Mielec.

Research by Balmer and Greyser (2006) indicates that corporate identity and reputation can be used as strategic tools in the actions of political leaders. In the case of Jacek Klimek, his function as the club president was prominently featured in the media (106 publications), highlighting his management skills and effectiveness in action. However, the moderate number of publications relating directly to the election campaign (36 articles) may indicate caution in linking the club's image to the political narrative. As a public institution, a sports club needs to remain neutral so as not to risk its reputation from political controversy. This result is in line with the findings of Fombrun and Van Riel (2004), who emphasize the importance of reputation management in situations where the corporate brand is strongly linked to the political activities of leaders.

The analyzed materials highlighted visual elements' important role in building synergies between personal and corporate brands. Jacek

Klimek's photographs appeared in 51 publications, indicating their importance in building a leader's image. As Rein, Kotler and Stoller (2006) point out, visual elements of the personal brand, such as photographs, are a key tool in the process of building recognition and credibility. In this case, visualizing the chairperson's activities in the context of the club may have been an effective way to reinforce his narrative as a local leader.

At the same time, the analysis indicated that the club's logo appeared in 46 publications, while images of the team or stadium were much less present (nine publications). This may suggest that Jacek Klimek's personal brand was more prominently displayed than the club brand itself, which may have been a deliberate effort to personalize the media coverage and focus attention on his activities.

Similar studies point to the benefits of synergies between a leader's personal and corporate brands. Ghodeswar (2008) and Rein, Kotler and Stoller (2006) highlight that recognizable leaders can reinforce the brand value of their organization. Examples of well-known leaders, such as Elon Musk in the context of the Tesla brand, indicate that a leader's media visibility and personal narrative can contribute to building a positive image of the organization. The findings regarding Jacek Klimek are consistent with these findings - his managerial successes at Stal Mielec were consistently linked to his personal image in the election campaign.

On the other hand, literature warns against the risk of excessively linking personal and corporate brands. Zarkada (2012) points out that such linkages can lead to a situation where a leader's reputation becomes the sole pillar of the corporate brand. In the case of Jacek Klimek, the moderate use of the Stal Mielec brand in the political narrative may have been a conscious strategy to avoid this risk, indicating thoughtful image management of both brands.

The political marketing literature emphasizes that candidates often use their professional standing to build narratives of effectiveness and credibility (Lees-Marshment, 2009; Scammell, 2014). The Mielec presidential election provided a unique context in which to analyze the relationship between personal and corporate branding. As leader of a local sports club, Jacek Klimek effectively used his managerial achievements to highlight his competence in managing local affairs. However, the limited association of the club's image with a direct political narrative may have been driven by a desire to maintain the club's neutrality and avoid image conflicts.

Conclusion

The analysis of the relationship between Jacek Klimek's personal brand and the corporate brand of Stal Mielec revealed a significant synergy, which strengthened both images in the eyes of stakeholders. The research results confirm that the effective integration of the leader's personal branding activities with the corporate brand communication can bring tangible benefits, both in the context of building the organization's credibility and the leader's image.

Based on his management successes at the sports club, Jacek Klimek's personal brand was an important tool for promoting his candidacy for mayor of Mielec. At the same time, the corporate brand of Stal Mielec, supported by the president's image, gained authenticity and recognisability. The prominence of the club's logo, the highlighting of managerial successes and the use of visual elements contributed to the construction of a coherent narrative that integrated sporting, social and political values.

The limited association of the club's image with political activities indicates a deliberate strategy to manage image risk, which allowed the club to remain neutral as a sporting institution. These results are in line with brand management theory, which emphasizes the importance of communication consistency and minimizing potential conflicts between brand identity and reputation.

The research enriches the existing literature on the synergies between personal and corporate brand, especially in local political campaigns. At the same time, they provide an example for other organizations on how to manage the relationship effectively between leader and organization in an integrated and long-term value-building oriented manner.



In the future, it is worth considering long-term studies that could explore the sustainability of this synergy in changing social and political conditions. An analysis of the relationship between personal and corporate brands in other economic sectors or in an international context could provide valuable insights into the universality of these mechanisms. Thus, this research provides a starting point for further exploration of brand management in highly complex and dynamically volatile environments.

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The Role of Packaging Designers in the Context of the Environmental Crisis

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ABSTRACT

In the face of a worsening climate crisis and growing consumer awareness of the negative effects of over-consumption, the packaging industry faces the challenge of transforming itself towards more sustainable solutions. Labelling and well-planned production processes that can effectively promote environmental values that benefit both the producer and the environment play a crucial role in this process. Working with experts from other industries involved in creating goods, designers can shape informed and mature visual messages emphasizing the importance of responsible design decisions. The following paper emphasizes that sustainable design requires interdisciplinary knowledge and consideration of long-term effects, such as using and recycling materials, which can help reduce waste generation and promote responsible practices in the packaging industry.

Introduction

The phenomenon of packaging has accompanied man since the beginning of his history, with the first primitive examples dating back to the wanderings of nomadic peoples. Strictly utilitarian products date back several or even several thousand years B.C. (Nougier, 1989, pp. 30-39, Drahotová, 1984, p.12). Packaging, in a sense, is closer to the present day, i.e., considering the mass nature of the consumer, which appeared at the time of the Industrial Revolution and the increasing demand for goods. Economic and technological development, together with forming competition, forced the need for commercial ways to attract customers, and this was achieved by using advertising and incorporating it permanently into the concept of commercial packaging (Kolesár, Mrowczyk, 2018, pp.90-91). On the other hand, the emergence of plastics in the mass market in the 1950s contributed significantly to their domination of the market and the increased production of so-called fast-moving goods, the remnants of which are a problem for present and future generations.

Packaging plays a particularly important role in the economy and everyday life, in addition to being important due to its manipulative nature (Stewart, 2009). The current market offers consumers a multitude of product categories, and these, in turn, consist of thousands of products that differ not only in quality but also in form or label. The customer, therefore, makes purchasing decisions not only on the basis of the availability of the good itself but may be guided by values suggested by the packaging designer. Their wide participation in human activities and the complexity of the processes involved may be evidenced by the fact that there are at least several

definitions of them, depending on the industry or function performed. Among these are logistics and production technology, marketing and industrial design. The last of these, consisting of printing processes, i.e. printing methods combined with material manufacturing techniques, appear to have a significant potential for reducing packaging waste, whether due to inappropriate segregation or not being recyclable for other reasons.

Design variables, such as colour, form or the choice of material itself, give specific communicative meanings, linking the sales dimension to the identity and image of the organization in question. As a carrier of value, creating thoughts in the mind of the audience, in this case, who are primarily potential consumers, its high position in the manipulative field of design itself is indicated (Wszolek, Moszczyński, Mackiewicz, 2017). This additional layer of meaning potential, in addition to providing visual qualities, allows another function to be taken into account, which is particularly important from the point of view of communicating pro-ecological values. The sociological aspect of packaging, i.e. concerning how it is dealt with at the end of its life and how the unavoidable environmental burdens created during this time are reduced, boils down to a change in the entire design thinking, in line with the adopted model of the Closed Circuit Economy (European Commission, 2019). It changes the pattern of linear consumption (buy-use-throw-away) to one where impacts on the whole system are already identified at the product and packaging stage and assume that one must design for reusability, thus reducing the exploitation of raw materials. Thus, the benefit of using this model is the minimization of waste.

Context, the rationale for the choice of topic

Global debates in the field of Sustainable Development, including the Agendas developed (Cz. Wodzikowski, 2009, pp. 67-69) and concrete steps at national levels (M. K. Terlecka, 2014, p. 8) taken to mitigate negative environmental impacts point to the need for change in almost every area of human activity. EU citizens indicate that the protection of the climate and the planet is an important value (94% of those surveyed), and the problem of waste, including packaging, appears among the most frequently mentioned (European Commission, 2020). In 2019, the global average production of traditional plastics was 460 million tonnes, doubling in value in 20 years and showing an upward trend, demonstrating their relevance in logistics chains and widespread presence in the economy (OECD, 2022, pp. 34-35). In Poland, 542,000 tonnes of plastic waste will be recycled in 2022, representing 21.2% (GRID, 2024). Global plastic consumption is estimated to triple by 2060, reaching 1 221 million tonnes (OECD, 2022, p. 35).

By using reusable packaging, material recycling, or focusing on the gradual reduction of plastics, it may be possible to reduce the amount of waste and minimize the need for new raw materials. Considerations for change, however, should start with changes in society's habits and lifestyles. The reason plastic has been so widely present and dominant in the industry has been the recognition of its cost-effectiveness and efficiency in FMCG, or fast-moving consumer goods. Relatively cheap and popular everyday goods such as cosmetics and foodstuffs, and with them, caps and disposable containers have taken over the market, with the consequences for today's society. Adequate awareness-building among consumers may prove to be an important step in bringing about change on a global scale, but it is the manufacturers (and indirectly the designers) who should already be responsible at the packaging conceptualization stage and then at the technical implementation stage, for the correct management of available raw materials and for ensuring appropriate conditions according to the regulations being introduced and updated.

In an era of a worsening climate crisis caused by environmental degradation and excessive greenhouse gas emissions, as well as a growing public awareness of the negative effects of consumerist lifestyles, the packaging industry needs to adapt to changes in favour of more sustainable choices. From the point of view of design, communication using appropriate visual elements, labelling, and the production process play

a key role here. With their help, the manufacturer has the opportunity to effectively promote brand values that are both good for him and the planet. The graphic designer, on the other hand, in collaboration with professionals from other industries, can prompt these choices, creating a mature and informed message based on the impact of the design decisions made.

Contemporary packaging design should take on the broadest possible context, i.e. taking into account future generations and the environment. Questions of material reduction and recycling and real opportunities for reducing greenhouse gas emissions are becoming relevant. In this context, transparency in terms of environmental responsibility appears to be an important point of communication between the manufacturer and the consumer of the product, communicating the pursuit of common goals. The designer can suggest more sustainable choices at the idea stage. However, this requires at least a basic knowledge of the risks and opportunities, including, among other things, the impact of raw materials and extraction methods on the ecosystem's various elements, as well as the awareness and validity of the chosen decisions. Thinking about the long-term effects of a project, such as end-of-life disposal methods or available recycling methods, can make a difference in reducing future waste generation and avoiding unintended mistakes or unforeseen consequences.

Literature analysis

Given the widespread presence of packaging in the economy and human life and its multifaceted importance, literature from a wide range of fields should be taken into account, including both production and design, as well as legislation and sustainability. On the technical side, material science issues, including knowledge of the raw materials themselves and how they are combined, seem to be important, providing an overview of long-term environmental effects and how to minimize them. It is impossible to separate these issues from the printing possibilities and the information provided on the labels themselves, which is a specialized area of interest for the packaging designer.

The environmental impact literature mainly focuses on the ecosystem effects of individual materials, including their advantages and disadvantages, as well as their system costs and recyclability. Thus, it is pointed out, for example, that the low biodegradability of plastics and the microplastic particles created when they break down pose a threat to organisms, especially those living in the oceans, where some 22 million tonnes of plastics

are already virtually impossible to dispose of ended up in 2022 (European Parliament, [2024](#)). Thanks to the good availability of the raw material - crude oil - as well as the economically viable lightness of the final product and the wide possibilities of heat treatment to form them into any shape, their mass use finds application in almost every sector. However, as reports indicate, the recycling problem is complicated to the extent that it requires an improvement in the entire sorting system, as more plastics end up in mixed waste than in separate collections, accounting for 43.1% (GRID, [2024](#)). On the other hand, their reusability is indicated for glass and metals, with virtually no loss of quality (A. Emblem, H. Emblem, [2023](#)), but the production and reprocessing itself is energy intensive. Similarly, despite exhibiting rapid decomposition properties, cardboard and paper require significant amounts of water and tree felling, and recovery processes generate additional environmental costs by using toxic bleach and biocides (W. Jedlicka, [2009](#), pp. 229-232).

Given these consequences, the need to search for and develop more friendly, often biodegradable materials is indicated, and the trend in demand for biopolymers since 2006 seems to be increasing (D. K. Platt, [2006](#), pp. 8-9). Alternative materials, understood as being made entirely from bio-based raw materials or classic materials with additives to facilitate biodegradation, are a new phenomenon on the market that requires further research. On the legal side, there is still a lack of comprehensive regulations regarding safety and the possibility of using them, especially in areas directly affecting the human body, such as cosmetics or food (European Parliament, [2009](#); European Commission, [2022](#)). As the European Commission's report on biodegradable and compostable plastic packaging points out, mere certification of the material is insufficient, as the properties may change once the product is incorporated, and currently, the assurance of safe use is dumped not on the packaging manufacturer, but on the owner of the contents (European Commission, [2020](#), pp. 25-27).

Definition of the design problem

Environmental pollution, caused at least in part by packaging waste, is currently one of the key challenges. This wicked problem, as described by H. Rittel ([2004](#), pp. 155-169), is particularly challenging to address due to multiple overlapping factors, including economic costs and causal complexity. It underscores the intricate nature of the issue and emphasizes the necessity of selecting the least harmful approach to

mitigate the crisis. The production of biomaterials from natural resources requires the use of land for plant growth, water for plant growth and fertilizers to maintain the productivity of the plants, thus affecting soil and water quality. Giving up alternatives and continuing to use traditional plastics will, in turn, increase pollution and microplastic levels in the environment, which could lead to new health risks.

As early as the 1970s, the importance of industrial design and its effects on the environment was pointed out by design theorists (V. Papanek, [1972](#), pp. 14-19). Selected authors even suggest that the designer's contribution to climate change is 80% (J. Thackara, [2005](#), pp. 1-8), and this follows from the definition of the field itself. Every product or service is created to solve specific problems and is guided by the needs and expectations of the recipient, who expects mainly functionality (J. Krupinski, [1998](#)). Design should, therefore, go beyond the traditional goals of functionality or aesthetics, adopting sustainability as the basic organizing principle of the entire creative process. In the case of packaging, this means striving to create products that fulfil functional and communicative functions, with the simultaneous potential to minimize negative environmental impact. Introducing such an approach requires moving away from treating sustainable design solely as a set of legal constraints to fully integrating this philosophy into design practice.

The design problem may not be so much about developing a biodegradable material and replacing traditional plastic, which decomposes in three months, but changing the very approach of thinking about packaging. Tonnes of rubbish in the water and on land is a modern-day problem, and while curbing the amount of non-recyclable waste, it seems important to find a solution for the existing ones. The proposal to fully replace classic plastics with alternative substitutes carries a systemic cost that calls into question the validity of such a solution. Approximately 2.5 kilograms of maize starch are needed to produce a kilogram of PLA bioplastic, and inadequate maize growing conditions can cause excessive greenhouse gas emissions (C. Kingsland, [2010](#)). A key challenge, therefore, is to change the current way of thinking about the production itself, as currently, the concept remains unchanged and only chooses different raw materials. The production of packaging waste has increased dramatically over the last 50 years, which shows that the manufacturing system is flawed. Instead of searching for new raw materials, the focus should be on the efficient use of existing materials and education on how to process

them. Understanding the material and printing technologies available can help to create designs that support the environment instead of burdening it. In order to reduce the negative impact of design on the environment, a systemic approach is needed to change the entire process, from materials to production to use and disposal.

Case Study: implementing ecological solutions in packaging design

Carrefour already implemented a solution pioneered nationally in 2008 - compostable checkout bags made from starch-based biopolymers. This cutting-edge approach aimed to reduce the use of traditional polyethylene advertising bags, which are difficult to recycle and seriously burden the environment. The

Figure 1:

Compostable biopolymer advertising bags introduced by Carrefour in 2008. Adapted from COBRO Archive (<https://archive.cobro.org.pl>), accessed November 20, 2024



solution guaranteed complete decomposition within a maximum of one year (Carrefour Poland, 2009), and the project's innovation was recognized in the sixth edition of the PakStar competition 2012 in the unitized packaging category. In 2015, Tetra Pak Ltd and Coca-Cola Brasil received a Sustainability Award for the introduction of an innovative carton made from 78% sugarcane-derived materials (WorldStar, 2015). By using this raw material, it was not only possible to reduce greenhouse gas emissions but also

to partially absorb them by the plants during growth. The Coca-Cola brand implemented an innovative approach to bottle design in 2023, dispensing with traditional labels. An embossed logo distinguishes the new packaging and serves both a utility and communication function. The abandonment of labels reduces production waste and facilitates recycling, as there is no need to separate the packaging components. This action is in line with global trends related to reducing unnecessary materials.

Figure 2:

Tetra Pak and Coca Cola Brasil packaging made from sugarcane (left) and Coca Cola packaging without a label (right). Adapted from Worldstar (<https://www.worldstar.org>), accessed November 20, 2024.



These examples show that introducing green solutions in packaging design has a positive impact on the environment and responds to growing consumer demands for sustainability. The initiatives also illustrate the diversity of approaches - from biomaterials to recycled raw materials to changes in packaging design to reduce environmental impact.

Findings

Sustainable design should not only be a priority for the future of both the industry and the planet. Modern packaging should combine functionality and aesthetics with environmental concerns, which poses a significant challenge for manufacturers and designers, further compounded by social pressure and emerging regulatory requirements. Today's consumers are increasingly looking for sustainable solutions, and brands able to respond to these expectations are gaining an advantage in the market. Packaging is proof that sustainable design not only meets the market's needs but also provides the impetus for the industry to evolve towards greater environmental responsibility, building on opportunities that already exist but are not always fully exploited.


Conclusion

Social responsibility is becoming an important element shaping the packaging industry's future. Consumers increasingly expect brands to engage in environmentally friendly activities, which is an opportunity for companies to build trust and increase customer loyalty. Green packaging can also play an educational role by providing information about the recycling process or materials used. Changing attitudes to design also affects the perception of product value - consumers are willing to pay more for goods with environmentally friendly packaging, encouraging companies to invest in innovation. The future of packaging design lies in integrating innovative technologies, cross-industry collaboration and social responsibility. These activities respond to current market needs and set standards that can contribute to protecting the environment for future generations. Today's challenges are an opportunity to transform the industry towards a more sustainable and responsible approach.

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The Impact of Computer-Generated Influencers on Social Media Advertising

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virtual influencers, influencer marketing, CGI characters, digital marketing, social media

ABSTRACT

The paper delves into the new phenomenon of virtual influencers, investigating their rise, impact, and implications for contemporary society. The study aims to determine whether computer-generated influencers can effectively advertise products through social media accounts. The paper describes the concept of influencer marketing in the context of digital marketing. It aims to explain the phenomenon of virtual influencers, i.e., computer-generated characters and their profiles presented on social media. Finally, the results of quantitative and qualitative analyses are presented.

Introduction

The world is becoming increasingly digital. We rely on the Internet so often that the boundary between the real world and the digital one is gradually fading. Social media's rise has revolutionised how individuals interact, consume information, and make purchasing decisions (Bojanić, 2019). New tools have emerged for both users and companies, becoming a new channel for reaching customers. Social influencers - popular individuals who have amassed significant followings on social media and wield considerable influence over the audience to which they promote products and services - are at the forefront of this digital revolution. Influencer marketing has proven to be an effective strategy for companies to increase brand awareness, engagement, and sales (Kawalec, 2020). The improvement of technology, the Internet and social media created specific kinds of influencers - virtual influencers - computer-generated characters that present their profiles on social media. As it turns out, this opens unlimited possibilities for creators and advertisers, as they can create any type of commercial and anything they want. Virtual influencer accounts on social media set trends and become an inspiration. Furthermore, the process works in reverse: virtual "celebrities" are created.

The phenomenon of virtual influencers raises several questions and concerns. The main goal of this paper is to outline virtual influencers' role in contemporary marketing. The article refers to research on virtual influencers, their history, their impact on society, and their role in marketing and advertising. The article aims to answer the following questions: Does computer-generated graphics gather many observers around them? What makes "celebrities and influencers"? Who is the creator and the recipient of these messages? Above all, what products do virtual influencers advertise, and how is it done? What kind

of brands reach for this type of advertising, and whom do they want to target? Are they exclusively premium brands? How credible are they? How are images published and created on virtual influencers' social media profiles?

Defining influencers and virtual influencers

As the name suggests, influencers are opinion leaders. (Górecka-Butora, P., Strykowski, P., & Biegun, K., 2019) Influencers can sway consumer opinions and purchasing decisions, making them valuable assets for brands aiming at expanding their reach. This form of marketing allows for a more personalized approach, as influencers can create content that resonates with their audience and does not look like traditional advertising (Whitepress, 2020).

They wield effective influence over their followers, shaping their views, beliefs, choices, and purchasing decisions. They build a loyal following, often thousands or even millions of users who share common interests. Observers very often strongly identify with the influencers they follow. Influencers typically operate on social media channels, run blogs, create vlogs, and share photos. (Kawalec, 2020)

However, it is crucial that influencers have a strong online presence to partner with brands. (Kádeková, Z., & Holienčinová, M., 2018) An influencer often specializes in a specific field and is perceived as an expert. Their success is often determined by their follower count and engagement metrics.

Virtual influencers are computer-generated characters or avatars that are designed to resemble humans visually. These characters are created using 3D graphics, animation, and AI (artificial intelligence) technologies. Teams of creators who script their behaviour, design their appearance, their personalities, styles, also manage virtual influencers' accounts and often through these accounts they

collaborate with real brands for marketing purposes. These avatars do not have to worry about hate or criticism – they do not exist in real life; they are the product of teams of graphic designers. The team of creators makes sure that their profiles describe stories from everyday life and, above all, imitate real life. Such characters, almost like real influencers, show their lifestyle and tell everyday stories. They use social actions and movements to create an emotional relationship with their followers. Their activities, including content creation, audience interaction and product endorsement, are analogous to those of human influencers. However, they offer a unique appeal due to their fictional nature, blurring the lines between reality and fantasy. The other difference between a virtual influencer and their human counterpart is that they are computer-generated characters that look like humans – they do not physically exist. (Darner & Arvidsson, 2019)

There is also the term of a “virtual ambassador”, which is related to a brand. It is a human-like avatar, and this concept refers to a character that is correlated only with a specific brand. Brands use them in communication with customers as brand heroes. Brands create their own influencers who not only promote products on their channels or on the brand’s channels but also build a community of loyal fans. Such influencers are often active on social media as well – Kenna (thisis.kenna) from Essence Cosmetics is an example of social media account of a virtual ambassador.

A brief history of virtual influencers

The origins of virtual influencers date back to recent years, with their first activities on social media sites like Instagram. However, it can be challenging to pinpoint a single individual as the pioneer of virtual influencers. In the last couple of years, the evolution of 3D led to the development of this technology in computer games, with more and more titles offering the creation of one’s own, often three-dimensional character – an avatar. The availability of CGI software and increased computer speed have made it possible for individual artists and small businesses to produce professional films, games, and artwork from their home computers. (Stamatoula, B., & Kirke, L., 2019). Currently, it can be observed that the creation of virtual avatars has also moved to the web, and above all, to social media. However, several figures and projects have played crucial roles in shaping this trend. Hatsune Miku, a Japanese vocaloid, can be considered a precursor of virtual influencers. Her

debut in 2007 marked a new era in music and popular culture, incorporating electronic music and anime. Hatsune is a Japanese virtual idol, whose image was created by manga artist Kei. It is a phenomenon that allows us to see the importance of technology and media in modern societies. (Sabo A., 2019)

The first notable virtual influencer, Lil Miquela, appeared in 2016 and quickly gained a substantial following on social media platforms. Miquela today is one of the most influential virtual Instagrammers - currently her Instagram account is followed by 2.6 million fans, and among them are well-known bloggers and celebrities. Miquela claims to be a model and music artist - she actively creates music, which she promotes on her channel on the YouTube platform. Miquela is created by two American artists, later founders of the studio, which specializes in creating this type of content. (Bendoni & Danielian, 2019).

Virtual influencers as an attractive tool for advertisers

The evolution of virtual influencers has been propelled by advancements in computer graphics, enabling the creation of increasingly realistic and engaging digital entities. These entities are not merely static images; they possess the capacity to interact with users in real time, fostering a sense of connection and community. Considering the evolution of virtual influencers from a technological perspective, a key element is the role of artificial intelligence (AI). Artificial intelligence makes the creation of realistic interactions, maximizing engagement and effectiveness of marketing campaigns possible. A virtual avatar can have real-time conversations, respond to a specific person, and create the impression of a personalized interaction. This opens new opportunities in marketing.

Virtual avatars offer creators and advertisers unlimited possibilities by enabling tailored, consistent, and risk-free advertisements anytime and anywhere. Furthermore, advertisers have full control over the messages and the “face” promoting their products. Working with an influencer whose content is entirely designed highly appeals to brands. Collaborating with a virtual influencer is also less risky than working with a real person. Additionally, the convenience of generating advertising messages precisely in line with brand expectations adds to their appeal.

Significantly, we are often unaware of such characters’ existence when we browse social media

posts. Sometimes, we cannot distinguish avatars from real people, making it easy to mistake them for a real person at first glance. This phenomenon often causes numerous controversies and brings publicity to the accounts of such characters, which arouses various social reactions even further. (Góraj, [2020](#))

Methods

The paper analyses virtual influencers' roles, discourse, and impact on social media platforms using content analysis to identify key patterns in their behaviour and interactions. Content analysis was structured into two parts: quantitative analysis and qualitative analysis. Accounts have been divided into three groups depending on their online activity: virtual influencers, virtual influencers as models, and virtual influencers as brand ambassadors. Several characters were considered – artists, virtual models, lifestyle bloggers and brand heroes. The study analyzed five of the most popular Instagram-based virtual influencers: Miquela (lilmiquela), Imma (imma.gram), Shudu (shudu.gram), Binxie (itsbinxie) and Esther (esther.olofsson). The accounts selected for analysis were the most popular, chosen based on their number of followers and from a variety of countries.

A table of accounts selected for the study was created, presenting information including the post count, the number of followers of the account, the origin, and the date of the first publication. The sample was selected purposefully to choose different influencer accounts, focusing on virtual influencers with significant followings and active brand collaborations across major social media platforms. The study involved a total sample size of N=100 social media posts collected from Instagram. From each account, the 20 most recent posts were selected, starting with the most recent post published on August 29, 2023.

In the second part, the research was conducted

utilizing a qualitative content analysis technique - in this case, comments. The research material used for analysis consists of selected posts from the qualified virtual profiles of the Instagrammers Miquela, Shudu, Binxie, Imma and Esther. The comments posted under these posts by both character creators and observers will be considered.

Findings – quantitative analysis

Quantitative analysis revealed that 69% of the posts tagged other accounts, while the remaining 31% of the posts were found to have no other accounts tagged.

A “tag” on Instagram is a feature that allows users to identify or mention other users or content within a post, comment, or image. It should be noted that only tags in the photo were taken into account. Tags within the content of the post and in the comments were intentionally excluded to maintain consistency and ensure comparability of the data. The analysis remains directly tied to the visual content by focusing solely on tags within the photo. The majority of the posts analyzed by the selected virtual characters were related to the promotion of various brands. Out of 69 posts with tags analyzed, 93% of photos in the posts had at least one company/brand tag. This high percentage suggests that virtual influencers on Instagram primarily focus on promoting products and services offered by various brands. Their activities are closely tied to marketing and commercial collaboration.

The remaining 7% of posts included tags of another virtual influencer's account or another person/celebrity's account. Such a low percentage indicates that influencers promote creators or celebrities; however, such instances are less frequent compared to the promotion of brands. It may suggest a strategy of concentrating on relationships with brands and establishing long-term partnerships with

Table 1:

Profiles selected for the study

No.	Account Name	Number of Posts	Number of Followers	Date of First Post	Origin	Creator
1	Lilmiquela	836	2,7M	23/04/2016	United States	Brud.fui
2	Imma.gram	345	248K	12/07/2018	Japan	aww.tokyo
3	Shudu.gram	77	206K	22/04/2017	England	TheDiigitals
4	Itsbinxie	196	84,6K	31/05/2019	United States	Neon Evolution
5	esther.olofsson	252	46K	30/01/2020	Netherlands	RauwCC

Source: Own work (10/09/20)

companies. In multi-image posts (galleries), only the tags in the first photo of each post were considered in this analysis to maintain uniformity. Such focus ensured that the same tagging criterion was applied to both single-image Instagram posts and multi-image galleries.

The analysis reveals that a majority of published content consists of single images - 56%. This suggests that account creators primarily post single static images to build their virtual identity. Image galleries follow closely with a 35% share. This content type allows for the presentation of more information in a single post, proving particularly useful for creating more complex narratives or product showcases. Only 9% are videos. It is less than other content, probably because 3D animations are harder to make.

Posts that did not include any tagging (previously mentioned 31% of all analyzed posts) were mostly focused on the influencer's character (in 80% of all such untagged posts, the main attention-getting element was the influencer itself). This suggests that account creators primarily focus on building a strong visual identity for their virtual characters, making them the central focus of their posts.

Content of the posts

The analysis reveals that fashion-related content dominates the posts, forming the largest category – 27 mentions. This category includes fashion designers promoting the latest collections and online and physical retail stores alongside premium brands.

Physical locations, such as city venues, appear frequently, with 11 mentions, suggesting virtual influencers often show real-world locations.

Interior design ranks as the third most featured category, primarily due to a notable collaboration between the influencer Imma.gram and IKEA in an advertising campaign – eight mentions.

E-commerce platforms are another significant focus, receiving eight mentions, reflecting the growing role of online shopping in influencer marketing.

Brands specializing in cosmetics and accessories, such as jewellery, handbags, shoes, and eyewear, are also prominent in the posts – with seven mentions. The local store category is mentioned five times, indicating that such places still play a significant role in the influencers' promotions.

Artists represent the other group to showcase their works of art and museum exhibitions or collections. Both artists and fashion designers were mentioned four times, demonstrating the strong relationship between influencers and the creative arts. Venues like

pubs and cultural spaces were frequently featured in posts by influencers such as Esther, Imma, and Miquela.

Smaller categories include collaborations with traditional media, such as the press, which appeared twice. Technology brands, notably Samsung, were also present, reflecting their engagement with virtual influencers. Additionally, several posts referenced magazine features: articles, interviews, and photoshoots involving these influencers.

Other elements, such as products, animals, vehicles, or food, appear much less frequently. In advertising messages or those aimed at presenting a product, these virtual characters often appear together with the advertised product. In a few cases, it was the advertised environment in which the characters were located. Their presence is often linked to promoting specific brands or products, indicating a commercial nature of some of the published content. This suggests that account creators aim to create a coherent narrative where the influencer is integral to the promoted message. It is worth adding that a real vehicle also appeared several times as a decorative element and a real animal appeared as well.

The number of characters that appeared in the images analyzed, including real people and other virtual influencers, was also analyzed. In a few cases, there were two and three characters, but the majority of the photos - 87% - show only one character - the virtual influencer itself. Photos featuring two or three characters are of lesser importance - 7% and 3%, respectively. The remaining 3% of the images did not feature any human or its representation.

This may indicate that interactions with other characters, whether real people or other influencers are used less frequently and serve more of a complementary function. The fact that a small percentage of photos have no characters at all may be due to the variety of content published. For example, there may be photos of products, landscapes, or graphics that do not require the presence of a character. The number of sponsored posts, i.e. advertising posts among all the posts considered in the study, was also examined. The majority of posts were not sponsored posts. This means that virtual influencers mainly publish content that is not marked as sponsored, but this does not mean that it is not directly linked to the promotion of specific products or brands. Only 4% of all examined posts were marked as sponsored. This relatively small percentage indicates that although virtual influencers are used in marketing activities, creators do not always make this clear.

The analysis strongly suggests that the largest

proportion - 77% - of published content is lifestyle posts. This suggests that virtual influencers mainly focus on posting life - stories, “selfies”, showcasing their lifestyle, interests and daily activities; creators want to make them more “real”. Photo shoots came second - 15%. They are often linked to the celebrity-fashion side of these accounts, and these influencers are, for instance, high-fashion models promoting interviews or related press releases. Other content types, such as advertisements (7%) and social shares (1%), occur much less frequently. The presence of advertisements indicates the commercial dimension of influencers’ activities. Such influencers are also involved in socially relevant topics.

A further element of the study was comparing the two distinguished groups of posts and their respective like-count: (i) with brand tags and (ii) without any brand tags. In order to present the results, the five most popular posts with brand tagged and the five most popular posts without any tags were selected. The indicator for popularity was the number of likes for each post. The data reveals a nuanced relationship between sponsored content and engagement. While there is some variation between individual posts, posts without brand mentions generally garner slightly more likes than those with brand mentions. This suggests that while sponsored content can still generate significant engagement, authentic, organic content may resonate more strongly with the audience. That could be why posts are not marked as sponsored, even though they still advertise a product. However, it is crucial to note that the difference in likes between the two groups is relatively small, indicating that both types of content can be effective in engagement. The slight edge in favour of organic content could be attributed to factors such as perceived authenticity, stronger connections with the influencer’s persona, or a general preference for content that is not overtly promotional. Nevertheless, the data also highlights the potential of sponsored content to reach a wider audience and generate revenue for influencers. Further analysis could delve into the specific characteristics of the most successful sponsored posts, such as the nature of the brand partnership, the relevance of the product to the influencer’s audience, and the overall quality of the creative content.

Creators

Initial anonymousness of the authors of virtual influencers is a common trait, presumably to create audience fascination and mystery around the created character. Currently, most of the identities behind

virtual influencers have been revealed, but when starting to publish on their characters’ profiles, their creators are often completely anonymous. The fact of the unknown behind the characters as well as the unknown source of their voice, arouses interest and generates much controversy. However, such cases have already happened in the world of celebrities, e.g. SIA or Daft Punk, who have kept their identities secret while being famous.

The overt and covert idea

It can certainly be said that humans do not run each of these accounts. It is just an avatar, while many of them present themselves as a robot, which is an overt idea. The idea hidden in this message may be that influencers do not exist; all creations are created by agencies, artists or photographers, often through combinations of photographs with 3D or computer-generated graphics. Furthermore, the audience and the characters tend to fall for the virtually created relationship and play their roles. The audience assumes the role of an active follower and engages in real conversations or interactions with the character – and the character assumes the role of a real person by mimicking typically human behaviours and habits. What is more, the messages and situations posted on influencer profiles are orchestrated and created by some person or group of people - most influencers were created to gather audience groups on Instagram, establish partnerships, advertise products, and thus earn money, which goes into the pockets of the creators. These graphic creations interact with observers or other CGI/AI characters on social media platforms. They undertake activities such as meeting celebrities or real influencers, engaging in interviews, speaking on a specific issue, creating sponsored content, and modelling. (Bendoni W., Danielian, F., 2019)

Despite the clear use of CGI in some Instagram profiles, people are still being misled into thinking the characters are real. Even though it is obvious that they are computer-generated characters, e.g. Miquela – doubts persist. Some articles often mention that these profiles are created using graphic programs and available tools.

Findings – qualitative analysis

In order to showcase the most interesting reactions and interactions between the audience and characters, various comments were selected, and accordingly, a following summary was made. There are many

questions - most of which are asked as if they were addressed to real people on the profiles of virtual influencers. Followers ask questions about the characters' favourite places to drink their favourite coffee, how they care for their hair, what they like to eat for breakfast, or what their morning routine looks like. There was even a comment about the character's height and the length of the dress advertised in the post. This, however, was met with a negative reaction from another viewer, but as the previous speaker said in response, "Robots also have some height."

Virtual characters often refer to themselves as "robots," which is often misleading to viewers because they are simply heads or 3D models placed in a photograph or a film - the characters in the messages appear in static or animated form. It can be assumed that they are made with exactly the same technologies as characters for movies or games. On their profiles, they show their business ambitions, release singles, and pursue music careers - like Miquela.

Unfortunately, such messages are not authentic, and the creators deliberately mislead viewers to get the audience's attention. Interestingly, audiences, whether aware of it or not, also often compliment the characters: "You're beautiful". Followers become part of the story. In general, most audiences of CGI influencers address them as if they were people. A significant number of comments constitute compliments on their choice of clothing, appearance, and beauty. Viewers get quite "human" answers to questions asked in this way very often. Characters on their profiles conduct a narrative and respond to interested viewers.

Virtual characters are often very active in discussions and very often respond to comments. They also have email addresses and often respond to messages, and in addition, they publish many comments on their profile. Each of the characters tells their story on their profile. The story is constructed in such a way as to engage the viewer and, above all, to arouse curiosity in the audience. Observers are curious to see what kind of posts their virtual favourites will publish and what kind of stories their creators will create.

Virtual characters present a vision of an ideal "life". They meet with friends, go on luxurious trips, pose, and party or wear clothes of famous designers, and their careers develop often. In addition, these artificial characters have their own complex personality generated by the creators, which they are eager to make visible on their profiles. Such actions affect the emotions and engagement of observers. Recipients quite mistakenly wonder what the virtual

characters are made of and how it is possible that they are able to eat or feel anything. Questions like this, "Are your bones also made of plastic?" can be found rather frequently. The character's messages, both the pictures and the descriptions underneath them, often try to replicate human behaviour. Characters talk about their emotions, complain about allergies or feeling unwell, as if they were human.

When Miquela appeared on Instagram, her appearance was decidedly less realistic. Her skin was pale, and her hair looked artificial. Because of this, there were many questions from observers. In the case of Miquela, observers speculated whether Miquela's character was a mixture of a real photograph and advanced digital technology. There were claims that her facial features were exaggerated, her fringe unnaturally even - doll-like- and that she resembled a game character or something between an avatar and a sim. There have also been accusations and doubts - it has been noted that her downy hair always falls in the same way, and her skin is incredibly smooth. There has also been speculation that Miquela is a student art project by a visual arts student. There were also opinions in the comments that the girl was a thoughtful product of some company trying to promote itself. Some people claim she is real, but she edits her photos using 3D software. By confessing the truth, the creators of Miquela have made viewers realize that Miquela's story is fiction. Even though Miquela has revealed secrets, there are still questions about whether she is real. The question: "are you a robot?" still arises, although it is so easy to find the answer to this question.

Imma's posts include questions like: 'are you real?' Despite Imma's use of the hashtags #CGI and #ithinkImCGI, many questions of this type can be seen in her posts. Interestingly, such a situation also appears under the posts of other influencers. Virtual influencers are created using flat or 3D motion graphics. However, articles about them being driven by artificial intelligence can be found on the Internet. This is not the case, but it inspires creators to develop influencers in this direction. According to some, the future of virtual beings is to be powered by artificial intelligence - through a combination of computer-generated images and AI capabilities. Companies want to create influencers that do not require any human involvement. An additional issue is that the images are easily mistaken for real people, especially on the small screen of a mobile device, which adds to the growth of doubt. The creators of Instagram photos take care of every detail and fine-tune the graphics to make the influencers look as natural as

possible. Often, companies create the message in this direction, causing much controversy and arousing the viewer's curiosity, which makes their popularity grow, and money for advertising is earned by the companies or the creators of such an influencer.

Conclusions

The research investigated the emergence and impact of virtual influencers on contemporary society, utilizing a qualitative approach to gather insights from social media users. The study highlighted the growing role of virtual influencers in digital marketing strategies and consumer engagement through content analysis of social media platforms. Findings revealed that these digital personas not only attract substantial followings but also can uniquely advertise and shape brand perceptions and consumer behaviours. Additionally,

the research identified audience reactions, illustrating how virtual influencers challenge conventional notions of celebrity and authenticity in the digital age. Overall, the study contributes to a more profound understanding of the evolving landscape of social media influence and its broader societal implications. Virtual influencers represent a significant shift in digital marketing strategies, offering brands unprecedented control over their messaging and image. As technology advances, particularly in areas like artificial intelligence, the line between virtual and real influencers may become even more blurred. This evolution challenges marketers, consumers, and regulators to navigate a new landscape where reality and digital creation intersect. The phenomenon of virtual influencers reflects current technological capabilities and signals a potential future direction for digital marketing and social media engagement.

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